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Old Kirby

Jane Felton Sampson

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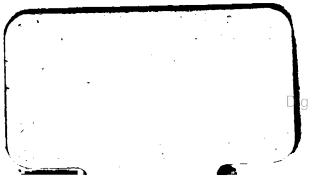

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To
Clara B. Whitmore
from
Mrs. Sampson.

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CHRONICLES of OLD RIVERBY

BY

JANE FELTON SAMPSON

Author of "Abroad with the Fletchers," etc.

BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
1913

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CHAPTER I

THE JOURNEY

Judge Winn was a native of Boston. He was a brusque man whose word was law, both in his household and among his associates. Still, whenever the family physician found any indication of failing health in one of the children, his austerity disappeared and he became as nervous as a woman. When, in the early eighties, he was told that Rachel, his only daughter, required a change of air in order to go on with her studies in the fall, the judge and his devoted wife immediately set about making arrangements for the girl to spend the summer at Old Riverby.

"Since John Bradley, the inn-keeper, is an old friend of mine, that is just the place for her," declared the judge.

Rachel Winn, then a girl of seventeen, was tall and slight. Just a suggestion of rose flushed her cheeks, and the wealth of nut-brown hair plaited in two braids and coiled about her head simulated a coronet. There was nothing striking in her personal appearance except when some pathetic tale roused her sympathies; then the soft brown eyes were expressive of unusual depth of feeling.

Going to Old Riverby was Rachel's first experi-

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ence in traveling without some member of her family. Though that was years ago, and though she has traveled in many lands since then, she remembers and recounts her impressions of the journey with as much interest as if it were the most important one of her life. Among her fellow passengers there happened to be a woman from New York with a black-and-tan dog wearing a broad yellow ribbon around its neck. At her left sat a German and his wife, who spent most of the day in eating and drinking from the contents of a large willow hamper. Who should stop at the inn a week later but the same couple. They registered as Mr. and Mrs. Teschmacher. The name proved too much for the table-waitress, and she called them the Tushmakers. But most amusing of the travelers were a young man and woman who were evidently taking their maiden trip with their first-born, an infant some three or four weeks of age.

From Barton, where Rachel Winn left the train, it was necessary to go ten or twelve miles by coach before reaching her destination. That was before the "ghost train" threaded its way through the mountains, or automobiles desecrated the sacred precincts of the hill-towns. There was some doubt in the girl's mind as to whether or not she would arrive without accident. According to her description of the old vehicle, it might have been taken from Noah's ark.

Some of the spokes in the wheels had been

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broken and replaced by unfinished ones, the fellies were crumbling from the tires; and the dilapidated body, with only a suggestion of yellow paint left upon its sides, tilted dangerously about on rusty thorough-braces. The interior was no less impaired. The high, narrow seats without upholstery were most uncomfortable. It was only by taking a firm hold upon a broad leather strap suspended from above that Rachel managed to keep her sitting.

The four horses, with the appearance of being poorly fed, were each decorated with a crimson worsted tassel that dangled from the hames of his harness. Then, too, the driver was not altogether prepossessing. There was something of a hangdog look in his face, whether it was from bashfulness or from natural depravity would be hard to say.

There was only one passenger beside Rachel; that was a woman from Barton. The girl noticed that the stranger had a basket which she carefully lifted whenever they came to a rough place in the road. She hadn't long to wonder what the receptacle contained, for the woman informed her that she was going to visit her daughter and added:

"I thought I might as well kill two birds with one stone, so I'm takin' some aigs over to 'Squire Bailey that keeps the corner store. He ain't no swearin' man, but he'll take his oath on my aigs every day in the week."

The chug, chug of the wheels, as they rattled

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back and forth upon the ungreased axles, was accompanied by the sonorous voice of the Barton woman, who made a strenuous effort to acquaint the city girl with the characteristics of the Old Riverby people. Rachel paid little attention to what she said about the inn-keeper's family, and her long story about the minister and his arduous duties seemed unimportant. But when the woman mentioned a family in which all of the children were born with six toes upon each foot and six fingers upon each hand, Rachel became interested. That information was supplemented by a detailed account of "dark Marjory," a strange woman who lived in a log house near the base of Mt. Manson, and who sometimes told fortunes for the village girls and boys. The loquacious stranger told about the fortune teller's dark eyes lighting up and flashing like fire, and about her purple-black hair just touched with threads of white. Continuing she said:

"Dark Marjory keeps three black cats for luck. They set 'round the hearth by night blinkin' and lappin' their chops while the corn cakes and ven'son cooks before the fire. When she come to the village she had some money, so folks said, and two or three rings. She can't have much now though, for she hain't got but one dress to her back, and that's all out to the elbows."

"Poor thing!" Rachel ejaculated.

"But for all she's in such poverty," the stranger continued, "they say the woman has got a little

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gold cross that she won't part with for love nor money. She wears it on a long string of beads, and I've been told that she holds it in her hand when she tells fortin's."

Just then a terrible clap of thunder burst from the clouds, the wind increased in force, and before the coach reached the village a perfect tornado swept down the valley. Finally a blast from the driver's bugle announced their arrival at the inn. Colonel Bradley, the landlord, with lantern in hand, appeared on the piazza. It was only by holding on to shrubbery that bordered the walk that he was able to reach the coach. At the door of the inn stood Mrs. Bradley with a flaring candle.

In spite of the cordial greeting given Rachel by the host and hostess, she was somewhat homesick, and would gladly have remained in her room during the evening. She knew that would seem odd, so, slipping on a pink muslin dress and putting on a string of pink coral beads, she went down to the parlor, never dreaming that each newcomer at a small hotel is a target for criticism. Fortunately, however, the summer was still young and only a few of the migratory birds had returned to the hills. Among them were three or four dowagers who came early and stayed late, a tired mother with her children just out of school, and a bride and groom.

The furnishings of the room consisted of a square piano which stood between the two front

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windows, a black haircloth suite, a red and green carpet having large figures, and several family portraits that looked mournfully down from their oval black walnut frames. Upon seeing two coffin plates side by side on the mantel the "creeps" went down Rachel's spine. "To be sure," she thought, "the bouquet of crystallized glass in the blue vase beside them gives a less funereal appearance than they would otherwise have; still they seem incongruous ornaments for the drawing-room of a public house."

To go back to Rachel's first night in the village; the river's incessant roar disturbed her somewhat. By a cloud-burst its banks were overflowed and the water ran past the inn like a mill tail. Before morning, however, the stream lowered somewhat and left the grassy border fresh in verdure and tinged with the yellow of honeysuckles. In the garden morning-glories nodded to one another and smiled through raindrops that trembled upon their dainty petals. Geraniums which had been housed during the winter, were putting forth their scarlet blossoms, sweet-peas were budding, and the hedge of red roses that bordered the wall flamed in color.

Beyond the garden-wall lay the road. Then came the river, separating the village from a high bluff upon which stood an old ruin. That relic of a great industry had no semblance to a stronghold. There were neither embattled towers nor a portcullis. Still, that city girl with an imaginative turn of mind at once peopled it with mythical

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characters. While at breakfast some one incidentally said that the dilapidated structure was an old furnace once used by an iron company. You can imagine how her air-castle was shaken. It was saved from total destruction, however, by the lady next her on the left, who said:

"A strange looking man lives there. The townspeople think he is a monk."

Before the erection of the academy, the new church, and the iron bridge which spans the crystal waters, Old Riverby was a picturesque bit of landscape that lured many an artist from less attractive scenes. Passing the inn one came to the village green shaded by leafy maples. Beyond, on the right, an old, red sawmill flanked the stream; on the left stood a tumble-down tavern. That ancient hostelry had sheltered many a noted personage and had been the scene of much old-time revelry. In early days it was there that stage drivers changed horses and in the meantime refreshed the inner man.

Beyond the old tavern and not far from it, a long row of cottages bordered one side of the street. They were all constructed after the same fashion. The doors opened side by side in the middle of the front of each, and a chimney at either end overtopped the roof. They were called the company houses. After the prosperous days of the iron company passed they, with the exception of one, were rented to employees of the thread factory. That one was occupied by the widow

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Starkey, who did millinery for the townspeople, embroidery for some city shop, and kept a few small wares for sale.

The "Duchess," as the villagers called the widow Starkey, was a charming woman. The children all knew and loved her, and the young men and women found her a wise counselor when slight difficulties arose in their love affairs. She knew full well that the course of true love never runs smoothly.

But no one knew more, both of the sunshine and shadows in the lives of the people, than the genial landlord and his self-sacrificing wife. Colonel Bradley, with a good word for everyone, was always ready to lend a hand. And it was Mrs. Bradley who made the wedding-cake, draped the bridal veil at every marriage in the village, and withal tended the sick and comforted the sorrowing. There are those who still remember her careworn face as she returned from a night's watching with some one of the thread-makers' children. When remonstrated with for needlessly wearing herself out, her reply was:

"'As much as ye have done unto the least of these the same have ye done unto the Father.'"

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CHAPTER II

THE ROMANCE OF THE "DUCHESS"

Scarcely twenty-four hours passed after Rachel Winn's arrival in the village before she was the all-absorbing topic of conversation. The young people were wondering if she, like other city girls who had been there, would be too proud to notice them. And some of the parents who had heard Colonel Bradley speak of Judge Winn as one of the blue bloods of the "Hub" were at their wits' end to know why he sent his daughter to an unpretentious country inn to spend the summer. Mrs. Bradley set the minds of the parents at rest, and before a week Rachel was sufficiently popular with the younger set to be considered one of them. By that time she had also become a favorite with the "Duchess."

The "Duchess" was born in a red farmhouse with a gambrel roof. It may still be seen at the summit of Marvin Hill overlooking the village and sheltered by a clump of maples that flaunt their crimson coloring every autumn. Joshua Marvin inherited the estate, together with two or three mortgages, from his father. Happily, the storks made frequent visits at the old homestead during the payment of the encumbrances and there were five children, all girls.

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No prettier sight was ever seen in Old Riverby than the Marvins on their way to divine service on Sunday mornings. Joshua, in his figured satin waistcoat, his black neckstock and stovepipe hat, looked a veritable lord as he reined his span of bays up to the meetinghouse steps.

The Marvin girls were unusually attractive when they grew to womanhood. Julia, the eldest one, married a Methodist preacher and settled in Detroit. Martha had all kinds of escapades, and finally married a physician and went to northern New York to live. Lavinia captured a college professor, and Patience, a fascinating girl, gave her heart and hand to a lawyer whose home was in Baltimore. That left Katherine, the youngest one, who became Mrs. Starkey, the only one on the stocks, so to speak. When some one joked Mr. Marvin about Katherine being the old maid of the family he said:

"If she is it will be her own choice! She has had chances in plenty, but my 'Kit' has too much of her father's good sense to hurry about leaving home."

Alas for the blindness of parents! One day the credulous father learned that his beautiful, cultured daughter was in love with Francis Gray, the tin peddler. In spite of the fact that he was the son of Esquire Gray who kept a large store at Lyndon Crossroads, bartering in tinware was too common an occupation for him who aspired to become the husband of one of the Marvin girls;

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at least, so thought Joshua. When young Gray asked him for Katherine's hand in marriage he was beside himself with rage. He refused his request and forbade his daughter to see her lover again.

To all appearances the affair was ended, but when farmer Jones over at East Branch had his first apple-bee that fall, it was quite obvious that Cupid was still on the wing. There the two met and had the first dance together. Doubtless they would have continued the harmless amusement had not Joshua Marvin appeared on the scene. He threatened to horsewhip the young man if he ever set foot in town again; then, taking his daughter by the arm, he escorted her to the dressing-room. What passed between the irate father and the indignant girl during their breakneck ride home will never be known. But old Rose Dorman, maid-of-all-work at the farmhouse, said:

"Katherine was locked into her room and kept there till she promised to comply with her father's wishes."

The excitement of the affair brought an attack of heart trouble upon Mrs. Marvin, from which she never recovered. During her long illness the seemingly penitent Katherine was both nurse and housekeeper. Soon after her mother's death news came that Francis Gray had married the daughter of a Denver banker. Then, proving that troubles never come singly, word was received that Julia, who married the Methodist divine, had left her

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husband and was coming home to live. The younger sister waited till the minister's wife was comfortably settled with her family, which consisted of two lively boys, a poll parrot and a Scotch terrier; then she said to her father:

"Since there seems to be no further need of my services here, I have arranged to go to Westfield where I shall engage in the millinery business."

"What! One of Josh Marvin's girls out in the world earning her own living?" the surprised parent exclaimed. "You may as well give that notion up first as last!"

Katherine's eyes flashed with indignation, but she wisely refrained from making any reply. Nevertheless, she carried out her plans according to her own judgment. The excitement attendant upon her leaving home scarcely lost its interest for the villagers when word came that she had married Colonel Starkey, a retired army officer. The sewing-circle met that week. Naturally the Starkey-Marvin wedding was discussed at length. When old lady Sawyer, who attended the circle for the first time for months, heard the news, she exclaimed:

"Has the girl gone clean crazy? Why, the colonel is old enough to be her father!"

"May and December! May and December!" ejaculated Mrs. Spriggins in reply. "The frost of one'll sap the sunshine from the other!"

"So, so, Melviny," declared the widow Miller. "And who knows more about it than you do after

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marrying Dan Spriggins, twice your age and not any too agreeable into the bargain!"

"What!" said Jane Saunders. "You don't say that Kittie Marvin has taken up with that old soldier who has nothing but a pair of rusty spurs to show that he was ever in the service? And all because she couldn't have Francis Gray! Well I never!"

Two years later the colonel died. If Katherine Starkey cringed beneath the fetters which bound her to a paralytic whom she never loved, the world was none the wiser. Immediately after the funeral she gathered up what remained of his misspent fortune, came back to the village, and opened the little shop.

Year after year passed, one as uneventfully as the other. Finally, one day the loafers at the corner store were startled from their usual phlegmatic condition by Mrs. Bailey, the postmistress, announcing the fact that a letter had just come for the "Duchess" which bore a foreign postmark. The missive was passed out to Joe West, who said he was going up that way and would take it along. After looking it carefully over he passed it back. Mintie Mills, the church organist, happened in just then and offered to take it to the owner.

It couldn't be said of Mintie that she had eyes all over her head, but that nothing escaped her notice was a foregone conclusion, as everyone in the village could testify. The following day she

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called at the corner store, ostensibly to get a paper of needles. She had no more than crossed the threshold when she exclaimed:

"Why, Mrs. Bailey, you should have seen the 'Duchess' when she opened that letter! She turned so pale that I actually thought she was going to faint. She couldn't have read more than two or three lines when she stepped into the bedroom. When she came out her cheeks were aflame with color, and she began talking about the weather."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Bailey, "that certainly did look suspicious! Now, Mintie," she went on, "far be it from me to think ill of any one, but may that letter not have come from some gentleman friend that she met when she was in Europe with the colonel? Of course, as I said before, far be it from me, but I don't suppose we who live here in this country town know anything about the goings-on amongst the upper ten folks in cities! Be that as it may, I shall be on the lookout to see who she writes to hereafter."

As it happened, no letters except those which went to her sisters were mailed by the "Duchess." Rachel Winn frequently took long rides on horseback. Perhaps she could have informed the natives regarding a few missives that were mailed miles away which bore the address of a gentleman across the seas.

It was the last Sunday in August that the "Duchess" appeared at church in a lavender and

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white striped silk instead of her black cashmere. That was sufficient to set the villagers' heads nodding and their tongues wagging. Even old Nabby McNeil, the Scotch washerwoman at the inn, said:

"It means nea gude for a widdie to be sheddin' her weeds."

To spy upon the movements of her neighbor Mrs. Binley, who lived next door to the widow Starkey, sent her twelve-year-old daughter in before nine o'clock Monday morning to buy a yard of pink cambric, a fabric which she well knew the woman never kept. Upon the child's return her mother said:

"I suppose the 'Duchess' is all tidied up and busy with her sewing?"

"Yes," said the girl, "and the lace she is putting onto a petticoat with more than a dozen tucks in it is that wide," measuring it upon her forefinger.

That much information increased Mrs. Binley's curiosity to see for herself what was going on next door. It immediately came to her that she was in need of a spool of thirty-six cotton to make the buttonholes in Jamie's shirt which was begun the fall before. After wiping the suds from her buxom arms and taking a look into the wash-boiler, she tapped at her neighbor's door.

Before opening it the "Duchess" dropped her sewing into a cretonne-covered basket beside her and took up a wrister that she was knitting for Johnnie Miles, an orphan. She little dreamed

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that her customer saw the whole proceeding through the lace drapery, or that she closely eyed the unfinished plum-colored silk dress that lay across a chair in the adjoining room.

Without stopping to mention that Chestina was down with the mumps, that Jamie's throat was covered with white patches, or that Susan lacked only thirteen of being at the head of her class, Mrs. Binley purchased her spool of cotton and hurried home.

"I wonder what I have done to offend her," thought the "Duchess." "She usually lingers to have a little chat."

The woman scarcely reached home before she began preparations to go down street. The following is her soliloquy that one of the neighbors overheard:

"I can't be without fever-drops for Jamie; then how am I goin' to know for certain that Chestiny's got the mumps 'less I git some vinegar for her to drink? I'll put the biler back,— a little soakin' more or less won't hurt the clo'es."

Then the children were told not to sit in a draught with the baby, and of all things to be careful that he didn't fall out of his crib. A few twists given the frowsy red hair, a change from the everyday print dress to her Sunday one, and the woman was off to circulate what information she had gained. One couldn't blame the poor thing for delighting in a bit of innocent gossip. A multiplying family, together with a shiftless

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husband, wouldn't be considered a bed of roses by any woman. In any case the "Duchess" was soon overrun with trade. Even old ladies who hadn't been to the village for years, came to see her under one pretext or another. One wanted a new cap; another patted her on the shoulder patronizingly and said:

"I think my old one will do if freshened up with a bit of new ribbon adjusted by your deft fingers."

One day, the first of October, a distinguished looking gentleman driving a pair of spirited black horses stopped at the inn for dinner. As soon as the stranger entered the house and the horses were taken around to the stable, every man at the corner store made it his way to have a look at the unusually fine equipage. Mr. Bailey, the store-keeper, who knew something about horses, said:

"That's a fine pair. Match to a t, even to the white stars in their foreheads."

"That may be," rejoined Daddy Cooms, who never owned the clothes on his back, "but they wouldn't hold a candle to the pair I had when I lived in Platsburg."

Thereupon Jim Downs put in an appearance and had something to say regarding the noble animals. All too soon for the loafers' pleasure, the gentleman ordered his carriage and rode away. You can imagine what gaping there was among them when they saw him stop at the home of the "Duchess." The excitement reached its climax

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when they saw her come out, closely veiled, and ride away with him. It was all explained, however, when the *Dixville Republican* came the next day. That gave a detailed account of a wedding that took place at Lyndon Crossroads the night before. The readers could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw that Katherine Marvin Starkey had become the bride of Francis Norton Gray, a wealthy planter from Australia.

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CHAPTER III

THE FORTUNE TELLER

Mrs. Bradley cautioned Rachel Winn about going off too far alone. In spite of that, one day, lured on by murmuring streams and whispering breezes, she took no note of time or of the distance and before she knew it was half-way up Mt. Manson. Stopping to take breath, she turned and saw inky black clouds pierced with forked lightning piled high in the west. Before she had time to retrace her steps the thunder came crash upon crash, till it seemed as if the mountains were being rent from their foundations. The wind increased in force, and mammoth trees swayed to and fro like so many withes. Nearly paralyzed with fear, Rachel sought shelter beneath an overhanging boulder. She had no more than reached the place of safety when the storm broke over the mountain. It soon spent its fury, however, and the sun came out all the brighter for having had its face washed.

Then the girl began to wonder how she was to find her way down the steep slope. Every trace of her footprints had been obliterated by the downpour of rain. The thought that she might have to remain there all night and no knowing how much longer was appalling.

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Every tree and shrub was loaded with raindrops, and the thickly growing ferns beneath them were simply drenched. Rachel's bedraggled skirts impeded walking, and in zigzagging from side to side she lost her way. After wandering about some time she finally came to the blazed trail, but there was no sign of a path. It had been washed away; in its place only a deep gulch remained. As that was impassable, she crept along through underbrush and treetops left by the woodsmen.

Rachel noticed that the sun was rapidly going down. All the horrible things that a vivid imagination could picture were passing through her mind when she saw a shaft of smoke rising in the distance. While wondering if it were really smoke, or if it were only fog rising from some pool of water, it melted into a purple haze and crept along over the meadows. In her haste to reach the dwelling whence it came, she stumbled over rocks and thorny brambles.

"Never mind," Rachel thought, "once there and I shall be safe."

Nearing the old shack, which stood at the edge of the woods, she hesitated about asking favors of one who lived in such a rude structure. There was no alternative, however; she had lost her way and was unable to reach the village without the aid of some one. It seemed an interminable length of time after she knocked at the casement of the half-open door before there was any response. Finally, who should appear but "dark

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Marjory," the fortune teller. Rachel recognized her at once from the description given by the Barton woman, her fellow passenger on the coach, and from what the village boys and girls had told her. Since she had promised herself that some day she would hear what the strange woman had to say about her future, Rachel thought: "Isn't this remarkable that I should be brought to her very door?" Still, she felt somewhat timid when she found herself face to face with the mysterious character. It was with difficulty that the girl found words to explain the situation.

In spite of the woman's threadbare garments, she looked a veritable queen. From her tall, erect figure and dark skin, bronzed by exposure, one might have supposed that she descended from some race of red men, but her graceful bearing and gentle manners were undeniable evidence that patrician blood coursed her veins.

Was it because of her youth and inexperience that Rachel was attracted to the strange woman the moment she heard her dulcet voice, or was it by some subtle charm which she held over her?

The fortune teller spoke in perfect English at first, then she began a low muttering in French and at the same time fumbled something in the bosom of her dress. After the incoherent mumbling ceased, she urged Rachel to remove her wet clothing and dry it by the fire. The wanderer gladly acted upon her suggestion. She had been thinking:

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"A pretty figure I shall make returning to the village in this plight."

True to what the Barton woman said, there were the three black cats. At the sound of rattling dishes they all gave one prolonged meow, lapped their chops and sat down on their haunches to await further proceedings.

"Have a cup of tea with me," said the fortune teller to her guest, "and I will see what the future holds for you."

Rachel thanked her, but it was with considerable hesitancy that she accepted the invitation. She had been told that tea was injurious to the complexion, so while making a pretense of drinking she poured the greater part of the fragrant beverage into a flower-pot beside her. As the life-reader turned the cup round and round in her hand she looked into it and said:

"I see a letter and a would-be lover!" An expression of incredulity must have passed over Rachel's face, for the woman continued, saying: "Truth it is I tell you. And he carries something over his shoulder. Perhaps he is an artist with his trappings." Before Rachel had time to reply the woman mused: "Beware, young girl, beware." Then she said: "What folly! Why warn a fair-haired maid? Love will fall as lightly upon her heart as the evening dew does upon a rose."

"Oh!" Rachel ejaculated, "then you think them incapable of real affection."

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"No, not that exactly, but it is the dark-eyed maiden who goes on loving, even when her heart is broken."

The poor demented creature soon forgot that she was reading Rachel's fortune and began telling her own sad life-story. The woman told Rachel that she was born in France, and that while on the way to America her mother died. Then came an account of grieving for the lost parent, and of the unhappy days spent with her father, who soon placed her in a convent. There it seems she remained till she was eighteen years of age, rarely hearing from her father except through the sister superior. The color came to the woman's cheeks and her eyes flashed with indignation as she said:

"When I left that institution the remittance which had been sent quarterly no longer came, and I was compelled to go out into the world and earn my own living. Think of it," said she with increasing resentment, "my father, who should have been my protector, has been living in luxury all these years while I have suffered the pangs of hunger, and, worse still, have been looked upon with suspicion."

Rachel knew the last statement to be true. Many of the villagers spoke of "dark Marjory" as some immoral creature who doubtless had for some reason come away from her kind to live in seclusion. And all because she concealed her great sorrow instead of parading it before an unsympathetic world.

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To return to the fortune teller's story: It was at a banking house in New York that she first saw her husband-to-be. Upon his arrival in the new world he called at the bank to exchange his remaining francs for American money. By some inexplicable influence the young woman at a desk near the paying teller's counter was led to look up at the stranger. Their eyes met and by the invisible force more subtle than that which attracts steel to the magnet their souls were united.

"It was the old story of love at first sight. And though it was told in a fragmentary way, the thread of it was easily followed." Looking out into the deepening twilight the fortune teller mused: "My François was all the world to me." Then she told of the delightful walks taken with her lover, and of the theatres, balls and parties which she attended with him.

Finally the woman rose and went into the adjoining room. By a slight tap of her heel upon the floor one of the boards was removed. From beneath it she took a willow basket which contained a beautiful evening gown of white filmy stuff trimmed with pearls and rare old lace. A wild, irrational laugh escaped her as she exclaimed:

"That is what I wore when the fatal step was taken! If any one dares say that I am not the wife of François Bourdillon I'll flaunt it in his face!" With increasing excitement she said: "I swear by all the gods in heaven and all the imps in hell that when I wear it again it will be in the

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presence of Him who, being pure, sees no evil!"

Rachel trembled at this outburst, but the next moment the woman was perfectly calm and began telling about her child that died in infancy. That brought on a paroxysm of grief. The poor thing wept piteously when she said that it was soon after the child's death that her husband confessed to having left the priesthood for the pleasures of the world.

"I couldn't believe him at first," the woman said. "I thought it only idle talk. When I found it to be true my heart was broken, and something seemed to give way in my aching head. As you see, I am no longer like other people.

"Child," she went on, "failing to keep a solemn vow is a deplorable act. But much greater is the crime when a man breaks his vows to the Almighty. It is all over with him. It were better had he never been born.

"How I begged my husband to return to his duties and thus expiate the wrong. That he refused to do while he had me. Though I loved him with all my heart and with all my soul, I could no longer respect him. And let me tell you that it is far more degrading for a woman to live with a man whom she loves and cannot respect than with one whom she respects but is unable to love. So to be loyal both to myself and to him I came away."

"Oh, how could you?" Rachel ventured to ask. The woman made no reply, but went on to say:

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"I shall never forget that night! There lay my François, sleeping as sweetly as a babe when I crept in to have one last look at his handsome face. When I passed the little empty crib my heart almost failed me. I hesitated, and was about to remove my wraps when something seemed to say: 'Are you also a weakling?' I faltered no longer, but hurried out into the darkness.

"I took the midnight train for Boston, where I soon found employment as teacher of French. All too soon, however, unforeseen circumstances arose which compelled me to seek employment elsewhere. As I gave evasive answers regarding my private affairs, the mother of my pupils became anxious lest I was an unfit person to whom to entrust her children. When she thought no one was within hearing she broached the subject to her husband, expatiating at length upon the harm that might come from having one in her family of whom she knew absolutely nothing. The good man, who had learned when it was too late that he had been duped by a pretty girl, made no reply. Finally he ventured to say:

"'There seems nothing wrong about the young woman except that she doesn't care to discuss her private affairs.' That infuriated his wife, and she retorted, saying:

"'The reason for your lack of interest in this important matter is evident. Your undue friendliness with the woman who poses as a French teacher has been quite obvious of late.'

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"'To the pure all things are pure,' said Mr. Wilds, whose ire was aroused by the false accusation.

"That her husband suspected her of having deceived him was too much for the woman. She made no reply, but when he turned around she was about to faint. At sight of the wife's condition the man was terrified, and immediately called the family doctor. The old gentleman well knew the trouble was occasioned by some domestic infelicity, but very wisely diagnosed the case as one of nerves. After writing a prescription and giving orders that the patient be kept perfectly quiet for a couple of weeks, he went away. The penitent husband saw to it that the physician's orders were carried out. The following day the children were sent into the country, and I was discharged."

"Oh, how shameful!" Rachel exclaimed. "And all on account of that deceitful woman."

"That is life," said the fortune teller. "When I wrote Mrs. Wilds, asking for a recommendation, she declined to grant my request. She said that it would be unfair to vouch for one of whom she knew so little. A week later one of the daily papers came out with a notice which said: 'Beware of an attractive young woman who under the pretense of being a teacher of French is trying to gain entrance to the homes of the well-to-do. Theft is doubtless her object.'

"That ended all hope of procuring another

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situation to my taste," said the story-teller. "Closely veiled, I went out day after day, seeking employment as seamstress,— all to no avail. Finally, my money being nearly gone, I took a place as chambermaid in a fashionable hotel. Scarcely had a week passed when, upon entering the room of one of the guests, a bloated, half-intoxicated man attempted to embrace me. To escape further insult I left the house without even stopping to give my notice."

Rachel's sympathies were so wrought upon that two tears were coursing down her cheeks before she was aware of it. A blush came to her face as she wondered whether or not her mother would approve of her listening to such tales, even though they were true. There seemed to be no alternative, however, for the woman went on, saying:

"My last position was that of nursery-maid in a physician's family. In a home where wealth and luxury was displayed on every hand I felt that I had finally reached a haven of peace. But, alas, the mistress proved to be a flighty, shallow-minded woman who cared little for her beautiful child and less for her husband. There was no congeniality between the couple, and all show of affection was merely a pretense. As I daily saw the existing state of affairs, my heart sank within me. I sometimes questioned if such a thing as sincerity existed. With the coming of spring the young mother suggested taking a trip to Europe and leaving me in charge of her child. I agreed

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to remain, and fully intended to, but something happened the night before the woman was to sail that made it impossible for me to keep my promise."

"What could have occurred to change your mind at that late hour?" Rachel queried.

"The doctor was in the habit of coming to the nursery frequently. It seemed very nice of him to be so interested in little Philip, but when he hinted that I was the attraction which brought him there, I thought it high time to leave his house. I made no effort to find another situation, and lest I lose faith in all mankind, I came away to live in the peace and purity which Nature gives."

The trials with which the woman was beset in a great city having been told, she stroked the folds of the bridal robe with her hands, and said:

"This and a few other articles of clothing were all that I brought from home. With such trouble I little thought that I should live so long." She lowered her voice, as if some one might be listening, and said: "Nearly a year ago I heard that a man in the garb of a monk had taken up his abode in the old furnace. My first thought was: 'Can it be that my François has also wearied of the world and come away to the hills?' To make sure whether or not it was he, I ventured up to the old ruin at the dead hours of night. The moon was just coming up over the mountains and by a single ray of its pallid light his face was revealed."

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"And was it really your husband?" Rachel asked in a whisper.

"Yes," said the woman mournfully. "And when I saw his worn and haggard face I was filled with remorse. I was about to throw myself upon his heaving breast and implore his forgiveness for having left him when the same voice that spoke to me so long ago whispered: 'Are you also a weakling?'"

Again the fortune teller counted her beads. Again she murmured a prayer. Then she said to Rachel:

"Now you are wondering why I don't leave Old Riverby and seek a home elsewhere. You will cease to wonder when the master passion, love, takes possession of your heart. Then you will understand woman's weakness. You will learn, perhaps to your sorrow, that to breathe the same atmosphere, to look upon the same scenes, and to watch the ever changing seasons with him you love, even though he is unaware of your presence, give some degree of happiness."

By that time the twilight had merged into dusk. Even then Rachel's new-found friend declined to accompany her to the village, but after the girl made a solemn promise never to reveal her secret the woman led the way out to the highroad.

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CHAPTER IV

THE FUNERAL

The scribe has often wondered if city life tends to dull the sympathies, or if in rural districts death is more thought of on account of its infrequency. It is a well-known fact that the dweller in a great metropolis is usually unacquainted with the people next door to him. Even when the invincible guest calls them to higher life he knows it not, unless, perchance, he sees mournful looking streamers suspended from their bell-knob.

How different in the country! There each one has a personal interest in his neighbor and the boundary of the neighborhood is unlimited. When one of their number passes on, the funeral is attended by acquaintances from far and near. The farmer leaves his plowshare in the mold, he dons his Sunday clothes, his Sunday manners, and wends his way to the parish church. The thrifty housewife also leaves her task unfinished that she, too, may be present at the performance of the last sad rites, and thus assure the bereaved family of her sympathy.

A dread disease claimed many victims during Rachel Winn's first season at Old Riverby. If

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her parents had known of the danger to which she was exposed they would have sent for her at once. That was before the germ theory came into fashion, however, and people attended funerals without the least thought of fear.

Rachel, never having been present upon such an occasion, was anxious to see what manner of ceremony was performed. When a young girl, the eldest daughter of the Burns family that lived up under the mountain, was taken away she asked permission to attend the services with Mrs. Bradley.

About the first to arrive at the church were Deacon Pilsbury and his wife from Norwood. The deacon's horse had been allowed to prance down the village street on weekdays. It seemed as if the creature knew that it was not Sunday, for upon being reined into the churchyard he showed his disapproval by tearing up to the steps with such fury that the buggy was nearly upset. The deacon's hat fell off, and Mrs. Pilsbury's best bonnet would have met the same fate except for the broad ribbon ties which were securely fastened under her chin. As it was, the jolting disarranged her bonnet so that the flowers upon the congregation side mounted high above her smoothly parted hair. The woman wouldn't have known the difference if Mintie Mills hadn't come in and exclaimed:

"Why, of all things, Mrs. Pilsbury, I didn't know that it was the fashion to have the trimming

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of one's bonnet on the top of it instead of on the side!"

That disturbed the old lady somewhat, but after Mrs. Bradley adjusted her headgear she went up the aisle with the same dignity and the same squeak in her shoes that it was her wont to have. It was a question whether Mrs. Pilsbury sat three seats nearer the pulpit than usual that she might see how much weeping the mourners did, or if she was anxious to see how they appeared in their borrowed weeds. In any case, the black bonnet belonging to Mrs. Bradley which was worn by a member of the bereaved family was not returned to its owner till late in the fall. One day, while on his way to Barton with a load of grain, Mr. Burns stopped at the inn, and what should be dangling from one of the stakes of his cart but that crape bonnet!

To go back to the gathering of the congregation. Not long after the Pilsburys arrived teams were seen coming from both directions, while others were picking their way down over the rough places on Ripton hill. The boys smiled audibly when old Doctor Bronson from Barton arrived. His cream-colored cob was harnessed into a two-wheeled sulky which was covered with yellow posters, that declared his spring-bitters to be the best on the market.

After him came the Peasleys, all wearing white sunbonnets. The Peasley family consisted of a widow and her seven daughters. If the truth may be told, they had a struggle to make both ends

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meet, so to speak. It grieved the good Christian mother that she was unable to buy suitable head-covering in which her children could appear at church; therefore, out of an old white muslin skirt that she had before her marriage she fashioned a sunbonnet for each of them. Their heads, bobbing up and down with every step, and the capes of their bonnets fluttering in the breeze were suggestive of a swarm of white butterflies.

There seemed no difference in the gathering at the church from that of Sundays till a line of carriages was seen winding its way down the mountain road. First in the procession came Mr. Bradley's three-seated wagon. In that rode the members of the immediate family of the deceased. Then came a long wagon, with boards laid across for seats, and two or three buckboards.

When the bereaved family entered the church all conversation was carried on in undertones. Rachel Winn was deeply impressed by the solemnity of the scene, and heartily wished that she had remained at home. It hadn't occurred to her that the casket would be carried up the aisle, followed by the weeping mother clinging to the arm of her husband. Nor had she pictured the little brothers and sisters, with tear-stained faces, following close to their parents. She suppressed a sob as the minister broke the silence by saying, very slowly and in a deep, sonorous voice:

"The Lord giveth and he also taketh away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

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Dr. Quimby, the regular preacher, was ill and unable to officiate, and old Parson Mumford of Lyndon Crossroads was requested to fill his place. Mr. Bradley and Farmer Brooks of East Branch exchanged knowing glances when the venerable divine mounted the rostrum, and a suppressed giggle came from the seat where Belle Bartlett and the new schoolmistress sat. One whispered to the other, saying:

"Goodness! I wonder what he will be moved to say on this occasion!"

It could not be said that the preacher had the corpulency which is too frequently seen in men of advanced age and sedentary habits. On the contrary, he belonged to the "lean and hungry" type. The baldness of his head extended to the nape of his neck, and a few stray hairs on either side of the barren waste resembled a fringe of grass bordering a desert. His deep-set grey eyes peered from beneath shaggy brows, and his falcon nose kept guard over a wide mouth in which two or three belated teeth were conspicuous.

When the mourners were seated and quiet pervaded the house, except for the voices of two women near the door who, in audible whispers, were discussing the best method of preserving strawberries, the parson rose, and with measured tread advanced to the praying-desk. Raising his hand, as if to pronounce a benediction, he reiterated his former statement:

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"The Lord giveth and he also taketh away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

Then came the reading of a hymn that was sung by a choir of a dozen or more voices. The words, already solemn, were made doubly so by a tune in long meter, and by each member of the choir making a strenuous effort to outdo his neighbor in giving pathos. Anne Eliza Jenkins droned her singing to such length that when the others were through she was piping up in a shrill soprano:

"Our days are as the grass or like the morning flower."

The singing over, and the bustle attendant upon the people again getting seated, the reverend gentleman began a prayer that consumed nearly half an hour. That was supplemented by singing another hymn which, if possible, was more doleful than the first one. Then came a lengthy discourse, beginning with:

"The Lord giveth," and so on. He might as well have taken any other passage of Scripture for his text. That the Lord giveth and also taketh away met with small consideration compared with the detailed account of everlasting punishment which the speaker declared would be meted out to transgressors. Gasping for breath in his excitement, he exhorted all present to take heed lest they be struck down without a moment's warning. Dante's "Inferno" would pale to nothing-

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ness in comparison with the lake of fire and brimstone vividly portrayed. Nearly exhausted with his effort to set forth the danger of sinning, the preacher began an address to the mourners. After expatiating at length upon the virtues of the deceased to them collectively, he appealed to each one personally to follow in the path of rectitude which had been trodden by the loved and lost one. When nothing further could be said regarding their spiritual welfare, he bethought himself that it was an opportune time in which to make a few suggestions about the physical good of the congregation. He began by saying:

"Naow, bretherin and sisters, jest a word 'baout this turrible disease that is mowin' daown both good and bad. The Lord be praised we've been marcyfully spared over'n aour taown. Prob'ly it's because we took time by the forelock, so to speak. When any one of us has a tech of sore throat we take a piece of red flannel and a thin slice of fat pork with a dash of cayenne pepper thereon and bind it 'round the offendin' member. We also take a little West Injy m'lasses and put a dash of the same warmin' ingregient thereto and let it bile and bile. On goin' to bed we take a dose of that."

It is doubtful how much more would have been said on the subject had it not dawned upon the preacher that the congregation was leaving the church. Many who seemed in haste to get home lingered about the vestibule and went in again to

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view the remains of the deceased. Farmer Bricket looked at the sky, noted which way the wind was, and called out:

"Come, Mandy, don't be dawdlin'. There's goin' to be a shower and old Jim don't care about gittin' his feet wet!"

The poor woman was disappointed with having been denied the privilege accorded her neighbors, but she knew her husband too well to delay after he said the word.

The Stone girls, two aged spinsters, went around twice to make sure whether the burial robe was of new material, or if it was an outgrown dress of Susie Byfield's that was given to the family when they were burned out the fall before. Mrs. Binley, who lived neighbor to the "Duchess," told Mrs. Bradley that it seemed a pity to have a gold ring buried with the girl, even if her beau did give it to her. Then she went on to say:

"I heard something said about taking it off, and curiosity or no curiosity, I'm goin' 'round again to see whether they have or not."

It would be needless to say that Parson Mumford's untimely remarks were the talk of the town for the next two weeks. To prevent a similar occurrence, the church officers decided that upon no occasion would he be allowed to occupy that pulpit again.

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CHAPTER V

THE RED MOROCCO BIBLE

Housed for nearly a week by a drizzling rainstorm, the ladies at the inn became nearly distracted with Kensington work. There seemed to be no end of bitter-sweet berries on Rachel Winn's turquoise table-cloth. To acquire a certain degree of composure for her distraught nerves, she spent one day in making necessary repairs on her wardrobe. Another afternoon was consumed in unfolding and counting for the dozenth time the little gifts which she had prepared for different members of her family.

There was a pincushion covered with bright beads that she bought of the "Duchess," a needle-book tied with pink ribbon, and birch-bark napkin rings for everyone in her household. When the key turned in the trunk the clock struck three. "Three hours before supper!" Rachel thought. "What can I do in all that time?"

To be sure, there were plenty of people in the house, but each one had something of her own affairs to attend to. The dear old lady Almy always took a nap from three till five. The woman from Chicago, who had two half-grown

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daughters, usually gave the younger one a cold shower bath in the middle of the afternoon. Everyone was aware of that fact, for the unearthly shrieks that came from the child as the mother poured ice-cold water down her spine were enough to raise the roof from its crossbeams. Rachel might have gone to Miss Beman's room and heard for the hundredth time about her love affairs, all of which proved a failure. That didn't appeal to her, however, and she went down to the parlor.

Samuel, the maltese cat, was the only occupant. He lay stretched out on the hearthrug fast asleep. Rachel played snatches from one piece and another on the piano. When she began singing Keble's hymn, "Sun of my Soul," Samuel yawned, gave one meow, turned over and went to sleep again. The girl never fully decided whether the cat's audible expression was intended for an encore, or if it was given to voice his disapproval of her performance.

In any case, Rachel left the piano to examine the contents of the parlor cabinet. It was a home-made affair decorated with fruit and flowers in leather-work. A long green box filled with stereoscopic views found place on the top shelf. In the front of that, ranged side by side, stood ambrotypes of former members of the Bradley family. One of them portrayed a handsome woman. Her large dark eyes and her cheeks, with a flush of rose in them, were set off by a wealth of lustrous black hair. The hair was brought down over the ears

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and carried to the coil at the back of the head. She wore a black velvet gown with flowing sleeves edged with choice lace. The neck was finished with a broad lace collar caught together with a cameo pin. Her ear-rings with long pendants matched the brooch. Beside this picture stood one of a little lad in a figured velvet suit. His round, chubby face was shaded by an abundance of shining ringlets.

A photograph album in crimson covers contained more recent likenesses. Old Elder somebody or other with a bald head occupied the first page. Then came Grandma Bradley and her husband. While Rachel was trying to make out the date on two large old-fashioned coppers which were carefully folded in a scrap of yellow paper, Mrs. Bradley came in and casually remarked:

"Those have been used for generations to close the eyes of deceased members of the family."

"Oh!" Rachel exclaimed, and dropped them as if they had been red-hot coals.

Upon the second shelf lay a leather-covered hymn book worn at the corners, a book of war songs and a collection of old ballads. The lower shelf contained a history of the United States, a story of the life of Christ, the family Bible and a few other books. Mrs. Bradley took up a small volume and said:

"That is the first book that I ever owned. How I used to weep over the trials of Winnie Malone, the heroine! I am thinking that if such doleful tales

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were written for children in these days they would forever remain on the shelves of the bookseller." Taking up a small morocco Bible, she said: "There is a tale of true love connected with this little volume. I only wish that I could get Uncle James to tell us about it."

Before Mrs. Bradley had time to make further comment the side door opened and James Farnsworth, a member of the household, entered. Turning to him, she remarked:

"You have said again and again that you would tell me about the romance concerning this Bible. Now, I am going to hold you to your promise."

Uncle James, as Mr. Farnsworth was called by the villagers, as well as by his family, was a bachelor of seventy summers. An abundance of snowy locks fell about his broad shoulders, a flush of pink was still upon his cheeks, and his deep blue eyes were expressive of gentleness and sweetness of character. He was something of a recluse, preferring the companionship of Nature to that of his fellow-men. On account of his reticence, it required much persuasion on the part of Mrs. Bradley to induce him to speak of his early love affair. The story once begun, however, he forgot all else, and in fancy lived his boyhood days over again. In the beginning he said:

"Strange as it may seem, when only a lad I used to dream of leaving Old Riverby and going to the city to live. From what I saw of city peo-

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ple summering here in the mountains, I thought they must live a real story-book life. They had good clothes in plenty, fine horses and carriages and an abundance of money. What more could one ask? When I reached the self-sufficient age of seventeen my father reluctantly consented to let me leave home and try my hand at earning my own living." The story-teller then mused, saying: "I can remember just how everything looked as I climbed up beside the stage driver the morning I went away. Tige, the yellow and white hound that we had had ever since he was a pup, sat at the corner of the house. When the coach started he gave an unearthly howl. I looked back, and there stood my father with his hands in his trousers pockets and his old felt hat drawn down over his eyes. My mother was drying her tears with the corner of her apron, while sister Julie clung to her skirts and cried for me to come back." Thereupon Rachel ventured to say:

"Why, my brother Robert is already eighteen and he wouldn't think of leaving home to go among strangers."

"Probably not," said Mr. Farnsworth. Then he continued, saying: "We went as far as Bridgeton the first day. On the next we arrived at Compton, where I felt like the man who said he couldn't see the town for the houses. How vividly the barroom in that old Compton tavern comes to me,— the long counter where drinks were served, the large basket-bottomed chairs, and the

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enormous fireplace which was piled high with great maple logs that smoked and sizzled!

"It was a cold, raw day, and there were a good many guests of one kind and another. One old fellow took no note of time — just sat there and snored, till the proprietor slapped him on the shoulder and told him that he had better hire a hall if he intended giving an entertainment. When a rakish looking fellow asked me if I was a stranger in town, I gave him a short reply, and took good care that my few shillings were safe in my waistcoat pocket. Doubtless he would have continued the conversation if Mr. Churchill hadn't called me out to one side."

"Who was Mr. Churchill, pray?" queried Mrs. Bradley.

"Why, that was the man who hired me and took me to Midland some ten miles away. When it began to grow dusk the horses quickened their pace and trotted briskly along till we reached the farmhouse, where a lighted candle stood in the window. We had scarcely halted when Mrs. Churchill appeared at the door and exclaimed:

"'Why, Nathan! Has anything happened? You are fully an hour late.'

"'Perhaps I am, mother,' the good man replied, 'but when you see the prize I have brought home there will be no scolding.'

"'Sakes alive!' said the woman. 'I hope you haven't bargained for another lot of salt mackerel. There's half a kit-full down cellar now. And if

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you have bought another web of indigo blue calico, every woman in the neighborhood will have to buy a dress pattern in order for us to get rid of it!' Mr. Churchill laughed good-naturedly and said:

"'I may as well tell you, Maria, that I have found a young man who will do the chores about the place and assist you with the dairy work.'"

The white haired man sat ruminating for a time; then he continued, saying:

"What an ideal home that was for a strange lad to go into! Both Mr. and Mrs. Churchill were God-fearing people, and their children, Mary, a girl of sixteen, and the twin boys, five years of age, were carefully brought up." Then he went on to say:

"How plainly that low-studded sitting-room comes to me. A large mahogany table stood in the centre of the room, and an old settle brought from England stood by the fireplace. It was there that the twins read their a, b, c's by the fire-light, or fell asleep after a game of blindman's buff. At one side of the room stood a long sofa with great arms at either end. It was unadorned, either by crazy patchwork or by afghans, but above it hung an exquisite picture in needlework done by Mrs. Churchill. It portrayed 'Rebecca at the well.'"

"Why, the bitter-sweets on my table-cloth would pale to nothingness in comparison to such a piece of work as that," Rachel commented.

"They might," said the story-teller, "if one

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considered that the most of the woman's spare time was consumed in darning stockings, or mending trousers for the lively twins." Returning to his story, the old gentleman said: "I had been with the Churchills three years and more when my mother was taken very ill. I immediately left Midland for home, fully intending to return in a few weeks, for, in spite of our youth, Mary Churchill and I were already engaged. I was detained beyond my expectation to be, however, and then, upon the eve of returning to claim Mary's hand in marriage, I received a letter from her saying that she couldn't think of leaving her parents while she was still so young. Thinking that she had become interested in some one else, jealousy took possession of me, and instead of making any effort to learn the truth, I at once took passage for California. Three long years I lived, hoping against hope that some day Mary would be mine. Finally I learned that it was all over with me; she had married Julius Barstow, a promising young lawyer."

Though the disappointed lover traveled in many lands, he never set foot in Midland again till the spring before he sat telling the tale of his early romance. In explanation he said that he was passing through the town on his way to Compton when it occurred to him that some of his friends of fifty years before might be living. His desire to hear something of them prompted him to leave the train and inquire of the station agent regard-

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ing the Churchill family. When told that they were all gone except the widow Barstow, whom the neighbors spoke of as Mary Churchill, he decided to call upon her. In continuing he said:

"When the tones of that old brass knocker resounded through the hall my heart actually stood still, and the creaking of the rusty hinges, as the door swung back upon them, added another note to my discomfort. Before Mrs. Barstow had time to reply to my question if she were the lady of the house, I asked if she had forgotten her girlhood friend. Removing her spectacles, she exclaimed:

"'Can this be James Farnsworth?'"

Both Mrs. Bradley and Rachel waited in breathless silence, wondering what would come next. Finally the old gentleman said:

"The three score and ten years have dealt kindly with the woman. To be sure, the lustre of youth has faded from her eyes, but a holier light born of patience and forbearance shines forth from them. And her once brown hair is even more beautiful since touched by Time's frosty fingers. When I rose to come away Mary took the little Bible from the bookcase and, passing it to me, said:

"'This is yours; if you remember, I gave it to you on your twentieth birthday.'

"I opened the book, and the petals of a four-leaf clover fell to the floor. Through a mist of tears our eyes met. No word was spoken, but the April breeze sighing through the pines at the gateway whispered of regret."

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CHAPTER VI

THE CIRCUS

That the circus is the great event of the summer season in a country village is a well-known fact. It was the last of August when glowing advertisements foretelling its coming to Old Riverby were placed upon the corner store, upon the tumble-down tavern, and upon nearly every barn in town. Among the most important features portrayed were richly caparisoned horses ridden by gayly dressed women, a baby elephant bedecked in silver trappings, a camel upon which the Siamese twins were mounted, and a trained bear dancing with a two-headed girl. It was the candid opinion of the farmers round about that it would surpass any show that had ever been there. Many of them decided that, rain or shine, they would take a day off and see it.

One morning while Johnnie Lawson, a simple-minded fellow, was standing open-mouthed before one of the flaming posters Mr. Bailey, the postmaster, came along, and said:

"Come, come, Johnnie, don't be standing there admiring the show girls."

"You go 'long! I ain't dewin' nothin' of the kind," said the youth, "but I sh'ld like to ketch

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holt of that woman's clo'es and pull 'em daown a notch or tew."

"What, don't you like the looks of her costume?"

"Like it? Wa'al I don't s'pose it'll make any diffunce whe'er I dew or not; she's up there and I cal'late she plans on stayin' till the show's over."

"I guess she will," said Mr. Bailey, "unless there comes a heavy rain."

Great preparations were made for the coming event. Every housekeeper in the village cleaned her windows, dusted her braided mats, and opened her parlor blinds in expectation of some visitor. The flower gardens were cleared of weeds, the plants were stripped of their withered blossoms, and the front steps of every one of the company houses shone with a fresh coat of slate-colored paint. Then, too, several of the boys built long tables beneath the trees at the roadside for the purpose of selling maple sugar, corn-balls, lemonade and doughnuts to the patrons of the exhibition. When some one remarked that it might rain and spoil their fun, old Grandpa Miles, standing near, said:

"I've lived here nigh on to seventy year and I never knowed it to rain of a circus day yet!"

The mysterious charm by which the show agent governed the weather has never been explained, but true to past records, the morning broke perfectly clear, and the blue haze which had hovered

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about the mountains for a week or more gave way to the sun.

The residents of a city wouldn't think of starting early in the morning to attend a matinée, but before eight o'clock the day of the circus inhabitants of the outlying districts began to gather on the village green. Some of them hitched their horses in the sheds at the rear of the town-hall, others tied theirs to the bordering maples. To be sure, they each had errands to do. Some brought their molasses jugs and oil cans to have them filled, others took time by the forelock and bought material for their winter coats and trousers. And some there were who got married. The guests of the inn were still at breakfast when a sunburned swain, with his arm around his buxom fiancée, drove up to the side door and called out to the kitchen-girl, saying:

"Is the jestice of the peace to home?"

Susan, the scullery-maid, was "a button short," as the English would say. In addition to her other peculiarities she had a habit of stammering. Partly opening the dining-room door, she said:

"Mi-mi-mister Bradley, is the jestice of the pieces here?"

It required only a glance at the couple for the landlord to anticipate their errand. When he inquired of the young man what he could do for him, the rustic replied:

"Wa'al, yer see it's this way. Me an' Betsy have been courtin' quite a spell 'long back, and I

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thought we might's well git hitched while we was daown to the cirkis and have the pesky job over with."

Mr. Bradley led the way to the parlor where, in the presence of Mrs. Bradley and two or three of the guests, the couple were made man and wife. The groom was profuse in his thanks for what he termed "dewin' the job up braown." He felt first in one pocket and then in another, and finally said:

"I hain't got much dosch 'baout me this mornin' but the fust time I come to the village I'll bring yer a peck of the hansomest lady-finger pertaters that yer ever laid yer eyes on. They'll bake inside of fifteen minutes and jest melt in yer maouth."

It might have been nine o'clock when an elderly man and woman, driving a typical "Rosinante," came jogging down the road. From their gorgeous array one might have thought that they belonged to the company which was to perform in the afternoon. The old lady's dress was an indigo blue with orange flowers scattered over it. Upon her head she wore a speckled black and white shaker bonnet which was trimmed with a band of green barége around the crown, and a cape of the same material, perhaps half a yard in width, fell over her shoulders. In her hand she carried a large palm-leaf fan. The flowing grey locks of her spouse came from beneath a dilapidated stovepipe hat. The figured cashmere robe which he wore reached nearly to the ground, while a pair

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of carpet slippers, down at the heels, covered his feet.

It was a great day in the village, and a busy one for the landlady of the inn. Before twelve o'clock every seat at the long tables was taken. There were young men and their sweethearts and several old farmers, who under the pretense of buying a scythe or a whetstone, came in to see the show.

Nearly every young man's hair was parted in the middle and combed smoothly down at the sides. Instead of the four-in-hand tie so fashionable at present, each refractory collar was held in place by a bowknot of red, blue or green. The girls were in light muslins, white piqués, and rose-trimmed hats. In spite of their bashfulness, it was plain to be seen that they were delighted to dine at a public house with their beaux. But it is doubtful if they were any happier than the parents who, with their children, sat in their carriages and ate a luncheon brought from home.

Mr. Carpenter, the village photographer, was overrun with business. Of course, all of the young people wanted to exchange tintypes. Then it was an opportune time for parents to have their children's likenesses taken. Who should drive up about noon but Mrs. Plimpton, together with her three sons and four daughters. While the mother hitched the horse the eldest girl assisted the other children to alight. Then came the adjusting of Lydia's bonnet and the completing of buttoning

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up Ruth Ann's dress. That done, the woman pulled Jonathan's hat down till it rested upon the tops of his ears. The youngster just in trousers stood like a martyr while she scrubbed his face with the corner of her handkerchief, and plastered his hair smoothly back from his forehead. All being ready, they marched single file up the long flight of stairs to the studio.

Mr. Carpenter was naturally a serious man, but when he saw the Plimptons arrayed before him it was with difficulty that he refrained from laughing. That the family was not over-stocked with this world's goods was a well-known fact, but the artist hadn't long to conjecture as to where the funds came from to pay for so many pictures. After giving another touch to some garment of each child, Mrs. Plimpton said:

"No wonder that you are surprised to see me here with the lot of 'em! The truth is the Mishnery 'Ciety sent me money to buy shoes for the childern so they could go to Sunday school. That was what I planned on doin' when I started out, but on the way down to the village I bethought myself that the poor things hain't never been to a circus, and that I hain't got a likeness of one on 'em."

The photographer was a religious man. Doubtless his conscience whispered that it was wrong to take for pictures money which had been contributed for the furtherance of church work, but from a business point of view he saw no harm in

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it, and proceeded to group the family. The result was that Mrs. Plimpton became the happy possessor of a picture of her brood and had sufficient change left to pay entrance fees to the show.

The animals belonging to the hippodrome came into the village some time during the night. All was quiet, except for the braying of a donkey, till about one o'clock in the afternoon. Then the thunderous tones of a bass drum announced that the show was about to begin. From Rachel Winn's room she heard the peals of laughter and thought how amusing it must be.

If the truth may be told, Rachel, at the advanced age of seventeen, had never been to a circus. With every outburst of applause she became more and more convinced that her early education had been sadly neglected. Thereupon she decided to take the reins into her own hands.

"There is to be another performance tonight; why should I not attend?" she thought. The idea had no more than taken shape in her mind when she seemed to hear her mother say:

"You certainly cannot go alone!"

"Of course not! That is what I have heard ever since I can remember."

The goddess of good fortune was mindful of the girl, however, and at supper-time an artist who was stopping at the inn invited her to go to the evening exhibit with Dorcas Pendleton, the village physician's daughter, and himself.

It would be needless to say that they went suffi-

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ciently early to get good seats, or that they were plentifully supplied with peanuts and sticks of pink and white striped candy. In spite of the fact that the tent was a flimsy affair dimly lighted by sperm oil lamps, which flickered and flared in the breeze, every seat was taken in less than half an hour. There were old people and young ones, and children of all ages, even to babes in arms.

The band struck up what was supposed to be the "Blue Danube" waltz. Immediately the bare-back riders, two of whom were women in abbreviated costumes, appeared on the scene. The usual feats of cantering, vaulting and hurdle jumping over, they disappeared amid great applause. Then came a baby elephant that waltzed around and picked up handkerchiefs and bits of candy to the delight of all present. Then two clowns in grotesque trappings came in. One asked the other:

"Why is an elephant like an amateur traveler?"

"I dunno, unless it is because it wears a grey coat."

"No, no, guess again!"

"Well, perhaps it's because he sees all the pretty girls."

"Oh! You're way off," said the jester. "Why, it is because he never loses sight of his trunk."

Instead of a camel being ridden by the Siamese twins, as represented on the posters, the diminu-

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tive donkey that had made his sonorous voice heard throughout the forenoon was mounted by two boys tied together with a green scarf. The trained bear proved to be nothing more than a Newfoundland dog that waltzed with a girl who wore a mask over her face and another upon the back of her head, hence the two-headed girl.

A hiss came from the rear seats, but it was immediately drowned by the applause given an Egyptian snake charmer who appeared on the scene. Men rose in their seats and swung their hats as they cheered the daring performer. Without the least fear she played with the seemingly venomous creatures as if they were kittens. To the amazement of all, she wound them around her waist and nestled their heads upon her naked shoulders. Some in the audience shrieked and others fainted,— still the woman continued to fondle the largest one; she even put her fingers into its mouth. In the midst of the uproarious applause came a loud report. Instantly a shower of sawdust burst from the python's side and completely enveloped the fair enchantress.

One can readily imagine that the hearty applause changed to denunciation of the manager of the fake show. There is no knowing what might have happened to him except for the timely intervention of the constable and two or three other influential citizens, who saved him from the infuriated crowd and assisted him to leave town under the cover of night.

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CHAPTER VII

UNREQUITED LOVE

One dreamy, hazy afternoon in August Mrs. Bradley and Rachel Winn drove to Norwood. The fields on the right as they ascended Ripton Hill were waving with golden grain; on the left, black stumps were conspicuous among the fireweed that flaunted its bright banners. The stillness was broken only by an occasional locust that poured forth his lazy song.

At the height of land they passed a small one-story dwelling with scarcely a window from which panes of glass had not been broken. The chimney was topped out with a rusty stovepipe, the shingles were much the worse for wear, and the piazza across the front was littered with corn-husks, green apples and tomatoes left there to ripen. In the unkempt door-yard stood four or five tow-headed, barefooted children in blue and white checked gingham pinafores, gaping at the passers-by.

"Poor Silas," said Mrs. Bradley, "how different things might have been." Then she gave Rachel a detailed account of the tragedy in the life of him who, with his ever increasing family, occupied the squalid home. "Yes," said the woman mournfully, "Silas Marshall was one of

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the most promising young men in Old Riverby ten years ago. Think of him now with his slovenly wife and that brood of unattractive children!"

"Why, how came he to marry one so much beneath him?" Rachel queried.

"Oh, it was another case of a man taking up with any kind of a woman when he fails to get the one he wants."

"Then he cared for some one else?"

"Yes, and his devotion for Laura Burton began when he was a mere lad. Laura was about fifteen when by her grandfather's will she was enabled to have a melodeon. No one thought anything of Silas spending Sunday evenings with her. She played for her own pleasure and profit; if he enjoyed hearing her surely there was no harm in that. In time she became quite proficient in music. When the church organ was bought Laura was engaged to play it."

"And did Mr. Marshall still wait upon her?" Rachel ventured to ask.

"Yes, and no. Why, he walked home with her from church the same as he had always done, but after a while, to the amazement of everyone, it became known that she was infatuated with Morton Phelps, a dapper young man who stopped at one of the mountain hotels. It was not till the stranger had won Laura's heart that Silas realized what a mistake he had made in not declaring his love for her long before. His reason told him that it was all over with him, but his heart said no,

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and he went to the girl and told her of his fondness for her. She was as much startled by the declaration as he was that he had made it.

"'It has taken you sometime to reach a conclusion regarding your affection for me,' Laura said lightly.

"'I should have spoken long ago,' returned Silas, 'only that I thought you knew it all the while. You surely will not think of marrying that stranger, and thus wreck both your own life and mine!'

"'How absurd!' Laura retorted. 'You know that I am devoted to my music, and I can assure you that I have no intention of giving it up for matrimony.'

"You see," said Mrs. Bradley, "the girl had regarded Silas as a friend — nothing more. Her only regret in the matter was that she had injured him whom she so highly respected. Everyone pitied the young man, but the only evidence of his disappointment was that he lost interest in his old companions and was rarely seen at the village.

"Laura was in a state of pleasurable excitement all the while. Why should she not be with youth, talent and the devotion of a handsome young man who seemed ready to fall down and worship her?

"The summer passed all too soon for the lovers, and the seat in church occupied by the stranger was vacant. The color faded from Laura's cheeks, and the habitual smile no longer played about her mouth.

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"'I'm sorry for her,' said Mrs. Beal, as we came out of church one Sunday. 'But she is old enough to know that that fop doesn't want anything of her but to amuse himself while away from his city friends.' Then who should pipe up with an opinion but Mrs. Binley, who said:

"'I believe that Mrs. Burton is wholly to blame for her daughter's conduct. Why hasn't she taught her that "the lust of the flesh killeth the spirit."'

"Oh! People are bound to talk," declared Mrs. Bradley. Then she went on to say: "With the return of summer came Morton Phelps, more ardent in his devotion for Laura than ever. It was a question among the villagers whether it was the tonic prescribed by Doctor Pendleton or if it were the presence of the young man that brought the roses back to her cheeks. The girl wasn't so much to blame for being infatuated. Even the married women admired Morton Phelps' charming manners, and didn't hesitate to remark upon the striking figure he made when riding about the country on his chestnut thoroughbred.

"Laura well knew that people were criticising her for receiving attention from one of whose past life she knew absolutely nothing. Still she continued to walk and ride with him at every opportunity. When fall came, like the other migratory birds, he took his departure. After all their intimacy there was no engagement ring upon the girl's finger. That proved too much for her

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proud, sensitive spirit and with the falling of the leaves she began to fade. It was a hard struggle that the poor child made for life. In spite of unkind remarks made by some of the villagers, there was not one among them who did not feel a personal loss when the sweet girl was no longer with us."

"The first lover was equally false," Rachel ventured to say. "It seems that he no sooner lost his sweetheart than he married some one else."

"Silas Marshall was a sincere mourner," declared Mrs. Bradley with considerable emphasis. "The villagers still believe that he would have been single to this day if that bold character had been less persistent in following him up!"

Rachel was glad when they reached Norwood. The bright, happy faces of the school-children were a pleasure to see. They were marching across the green on their way to a picnic. One youngster acted as drummer, and another was red in the face with trying to play a broken flute. Old Kate, the mare, pricked up her ears and was inclined to shy. Her better judgment prevailed, however, and she finally trotted down the street as if nothing had happened.

Upon reaching Parker's store, where everything could be bought from an ounce of mustard seed to a mowing machine, the proprietor assisted the ladies to alight and hitched their horse. Mr. Parker was a tall, spare man with red hair, blue eyes and a fringe of sandy whiskers around his

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face. He inquired after all the Old Riverby people from Deacon Munsey, the town representative, to Grandma Stillman who lived at the poor-farm. Then, eying Rachel closely, he said:

"Who is this slip of a gal, Mis' Bradley? One of your city boarders?"

Thereupon Mrs. Bradley introduced Rachel to him and told him that it was her first visit to Old Riverby and that she was charmed with the place.

"I suppose she knows the "Duchess" by this time?"

Without waiting for her friend to reply Rachel said:

"Oh, yes, and I think she is lovely!"

"Do, do you? Wa'al you can bate you ain't the only one that thinks so. The 'Duchess' wouldn't be a widder now nor Jake Parker wouldn't be keepin' old bach's hall if she'd had eyes for anybody but that tin-peddler, Gray, when she was a gal."

Mrs. Bradley, well knowing Mr. Parker's weakness on that point, changed the subject by asking for several articles which she wished to purchase. All being ready, the shoppers returned home by way of the river road. When they crossed the bridge and turned the corner at the church the inn-keeper's wife said:

"Just think of it! A whole afternoon without hearing any complaints from the guests about headaches, heartaches or jealousies of one another. Why, it has given me a new lease of life!"

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Whether old Kate understood what was said and became imbued with the same spirit of hilarity will never be known, but she immediately started upon the run. In spite of the close rein held over her, she veered to the left, the forward wheel of the carriage caught in the rear wheel of a buckboard which stood in front of the old tavern, and Mrs. Bradley and Rachel came near being upset. The mare kept right on at the same pace, however, till they turned into the yard. Then the wise old creature walked leisurely up to the stable door and neighed for her supper.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE RECLUSE

As you already know, it was the summer before Rachel Winn went to Old Riverby that a stranger took up his abode in the old furnace. It was of no use to any one else, so his right to remain there was not questioned.

Soon after Rachel's arrival she wrote home a description of the village and of the people whom she had met. She gave a detailed account of the recluse, of his living in an old ruin on the hillside, and very unwisely said that she hoped to make his acquaintance. The return mail brought her no less than half a dozen letters, nearly all of which charged her not to think of such a thing. In the tear-stained one from her mother Rachel was gently reproved for having a morbid curiosity about unusual characters. Her Aunt Mintie, who lived in the family, sent a long missive warning her of the dangers that surrounded a young girl even in a country village.

"Yes, my dear," the spinster wrote, "there is many a wolf in sheep's clothing in these days."

The last letter to be read came from Rachel's nine year old brother, who said in his masterful way:

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"Rachel, don't you mind what mamma and auntie tell you about not going to see the boogy-man. I say go ahead. Perhaps he was once a neighbor to Hannah Dustin and can tell you all about killing the Injuns."

The anxiety on the part of the girl's friends was needless, for it was no easy matter to make the acquaintance of the stranger. He rarely left his hermitage by day. When he did it was only to stroll over the hills through a thickly wooded forest. There he found young squirrels and rabbits, which he brought home. Some of the villagers looked upon the taming of such animals with suspicion. They thought that by the prolific propagation of their kind the neighboring gardens would be overrun with them. As it turned out, their fears on that score were unnecessary.

One night in the latter part of September the old ruin was reduced to ashes. It was between twelve and one o'clock when the church bell gave the alarm. The first stroke had scarcely ceased to vibrate before every man, woman and child in the village was up and out. When they saw the structure all ablaze, a cry arose:

"Save the hermit! Save the hermit!" One after another said to his neighbor:

"You lead and I'll follow."

No one dared take the initiative, however. They stood appalled before the fiery crucible. It required a stout heart to enter the burning build-

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ing when the flames like a thousand-headed hydra licked up the shingles as if they were dried parchment, and when with each falling timber livid tongues of fire pierced the darkness. Finally there was a jostling of the people and a tall figure, wrapped in a long loose robe with a hood that concealed the features, rushed through the crowd and on into the very face of death. A moment and the newcomer brought out the prostrate form of the recluse. The heroic deed performed, the figure disappeared as mysteriously as it came. Old Uncle Spencer, whose mind was somewhat turned on the subject of religion, took the unknown personage to be an angel. Others thought that some daring adventurer's name would be heralded throughout the country the next day.

The unfortunate man was carried across the river to the inn. Upon examination by Doctor Pendleton it was found that life was not extinct. Though revived by stimulants, the man fully realized that he had but a short time to live. Motioning everyone except the doctor to leave the room, he said:

"Naturally, my life of seclusion has been commented upon by the villagers. Doubtless some of them have thought me demented, while perhaps others have looked upon me as a fugitive from justice. As I am so soon to pass to that bourne whence no traveler returns, I wish these good people to know that I a neither a lunatic nor a criminal."

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"In the contour of your face and in your natural bearing I have seen the true gentleman," said the doctor. "There can be no question but blood tells."

With that encouragement the dying man went on to say:

"Many years ago Count Bourdillon came to America to settle his uncle's estate. Much of the property was in Washington. While there he met and fell in love with Miss Ruth Wellington, daughter of Senator Wellington. Immediately after the count's engagement to the young woman, urgent business necessitated his speedy return to France. By persuasion on the part of her lover the girl was prevailed upon to forego the pleasure of a large wedding, and to be married quietly the day before sailing. Two years later an heir was born to the couple. I am that son, and whether my coming brought more of joy than sorrow to my mother's homesick heart I cannot say.

"My father worshipped his beautiful wife, but his religion was paramount to all else. I have always believed that, though my mother united with the Catholic church, at heart she remained a Protestant. She was heartbroken when I was sent away to study for the priesthood. Though still young I, too, had my doubts as to whether I loved the church sufficiently to become a leader of its people."

The man said no more, and like the last flickering blaze of a candle his life passed out. The

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leaves of a much worn note-book bearing the name of Francois Bourdillon revealed the rest of the sad story. Doctor Pendleton translated the journal, which read as follows:

"Would to God that I could return to my childhood! Again to walk in the old rose garden, hand in hand with my sainted mother. Again to hear her gentle voice and to feel the touch of her soft lips in a good-night kiss. Ah! Those were happy days, but I knew it not. I see, when it is too late, that I should have listened to the voice within which told me that I was unfit for the priesthood. I now realize that it was pride and ambition which I mistook for religious fervor that induced me to carry out my father's wishes. The goal is now reached, and still my restless soul is unsatisfied. I think of a broader life by day and dream of it by night. Unless I can loose the fetters that bind me I would rather die."

The next entry in the diary dated some time later consisted of long prayers for deliverance from illness and from rough seas that buffeted the vessel upon which he came to America.

Months passed before anything else was written. Meanwhile, Cupid must have sought out the stranger, for when once more he took up his pen the sketches were radiant with color. The sky was no longer grey and threatening. It was draped with pearl-grey and old-rose, with violet and pale pink, and with royal purple fringed with gold. Every tree and shrub whispered of love

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to the lover; their leaves took on a more tender green, their blossoms perfumed the air with unusual aroma, and the birds among their branches never poured forth such melody.

"The sentiment expressed in those halcyon days was too tender to repeat," said Doctor Pendleton. "I read page after page of which I made no translation. There are some things too sacred to be flaunted before the eyes of a cold, critical world. It was the same old story of love's young dream; what need to tell it?"

The next entry made three years later, which told of the death of the hermit's child and of the mysterious disappearance of his beautiful wife, brought tears to the good old doctor's eyes. Upon a page dated September twenty-eighth was written:

"Something tells me that my days are numbered. Since time has robbed me of all that made life worth living I would not have it otherwise. If with all my suffering I have not expiated the crime of failing in my vows to the church, further judgment from the Almighty cannot come too soon. Each day spent in a probationary existence will bring me that much nearer the haven of peace where I hope to be reunited with those I love."

Rachel Winn had thus far carefully guarded the fortune teller's secret. But, well knowing that the hermit's rescuer was none other than his faithful wife, she felt justified in telling the story to Mrs. Bradley. She thought:

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"Who knows where the poor creature sought shelter after disappearing from the crowd last night? Or who can tell but, overcome by fatigue, she may have died?"

Mrs. Bradley scarcely waited to hear the last of the sad tale. She hurried downstairs and out into the garden to find her husband. Within half an hour the inn-keeper and his wife and Rachel Winn were on their way to the home of "dark Marjory." Old Kate started off at a brisk trot, as if she knew that she was on some errand of mercy. The long shadows and the purpling mountains already foretold the coming of night, and the mournful song of a whip-poor-will came across the meadows. Upon reaching the hovel and finding the door and windows closed, Mr. Bradley said:

"Since the place has been vacated, there can be no harm in entering."

When he opened the rickety door and found no one in the kitchen, he passed on to the bedroom. There, upon an old couch covered with a fine linen sheet, lay the lifeless form of the woman whom they sought. The visitors stood amazed. That inexplicable influence felt in the presence of death rendered them speechless. Mrs. Bradley was the first to break the silence. She said:

"Think of it, John! This poor creature has actually died here alone under the very eaves of our village, and we pretend to be Christian people!" She took a step forward and hesitated, as

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if afraid that the lifeless corpse might rise up and denounce her. Upon removing the dainty handkerchief with which the face was covered, she was surprised that the features, distorted in life, were so beautiful in the repose of death. The luxuriant hair, formerly disheveled, lay in smoothly plaited braids about the low broad forehead. The burial robe was the wedding dress which the woman had shown to Rachel Winn only a few weeks before. A plain gold ring encircled the third finger of the left hand, and a rosary with a gold cross attached to it was suspended from her neck.

Mr. Bradley picked a scrap of paper from the floor, and reading the inscription upon it, exclaimed:

"Poison!" Then he went on to say: "Doubtless the shock of again seeing her husband restored the woman's reason. Rather than live without him she has taken her own life."

The question arose, what should be done? It was already dusk and neither Rachel nor Mrs. Bradley would remain there alone. It was finally decided that Rachel should drive down to the village and carry the sad news. In less time than it takes for the telling, Doctor Pendleton and Mr. Glines, the undertaker, were on their way to the desolate home. The lone woman was carried to the inn, where the following day funeral services were held for her and her husband, and they were buried side by side in the Bradley family

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lot. The tragic ending of the two unhappy lives made a deep impression on the villagers. To this day children speak in whispers as they strew the unmarked graves with wild flowers.

News of the conflagration spread rapidly. Many came from adjoining towns to see the smouldering ruins. Others, out of morbid curiosity, came to view the newly made graves and to hear what they could about the fated couple. Day after day groups of old men, each leaning upon his staff, together with young men and their sweethearts, wandered about the hillside and gave their opinion as to how the fire started, and as to whether it was from the flames or from smoke that the hermit lost his life.

The day before the burning of the old furnace is still remembered by many of the town's people. It was dull in the morning, and the three artists who had just come to the inn hesitated about going out sketching. It cleared toward noon, however, and they took their art materials, their white umbrellas and a box of lunch, and started. Toward night, with the sun swinging low in the west, a golden mist permeated the atmosphere and tinged the moutain peaks with unusual splendor. The perfect stillness, which seemed to portend some coming evil, was broken only by the bleating of a young lamb in the pasture across the river.

The artists returned just at twilight, each bringing a sketch of some picturesque spot. The

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"ohs" and "ahs" from the guests about the delicate coloring were lost on the hungry trio. Having had only a light lunch since morning, the delicious supper claimed their undivided attention.

It was not till all were gathered around the wood fire in the parlor that the tongues of the three were loosed. Then the halls fairly rang with laughter at their jokes. Each one may have had his share of peculiarities accorded to men of genius. In any case, they were indeed a jovial company. Strangely enough, not long ago, one who was then a guest of the inn, came across a pencil sketch which was drawn that evening by one of the merrymakers. He has since become a famous artist, therefore, it would never do to mention his name.

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CHAPTER IX

PATRICK SPELLMAN

Without some mention of the carriage driver who took the guests of the inn to the mountains time and again, and who amused them with his droll sayings, the chronicles of Old Riverby would be incomplete. A typical son of Erin was Patrick Spellman, with a heart full of love for his neighbors, for his Mary Ann, and for his brood of fair-haired children that looked as much alike as so many peas in a pod. A twinkle in his mild blue eye suggested joviality, and his head was as full of yarns as an old reel. But withal, if the truth may be told, Pat was in the habit of tippling.

The Spellmans lived in a log house about halfway between Old Riverby and Barton. Mrs. Bradley never went that way without calling to see how the wife and chilrden were getting along, and the best of it was she never went empty-handed. Either apples or seedcakes for the little ones always found place in her capacious hand bag. And she never forgot to take a package of her delicious green tea to the hard-working mother.

Rachel Winn chanced to be with the inn-keeper's wife one day when she called upon the driver's

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family. The children, well knowing that some treat was in store for them, flocked around the good woman like so many chickens around their breakfast. They followed her into the house, and having been told that they were as shy as partridges, Rachel didn't expect to see them again. But while she sat there in the carriage they came out, one after another.

To the great disappointment of the Spellmans, their children were all boys. When the fourth one, a delicate, effeminate little fellow came, word went out that it was a girl. They named him Mikanna, and kept him in dresses a number of years after he should have been in trousers. Though the child was nine years of age when Rachel first saw him, he was still in petticoats, and wore his hair in a braid down his back. Whether he knew instinctively that he was unsuitably clad would be hard to say; however, he concealed himself behind a large pine at the corner of the house and, like a squirrel, took occasional peeps at the stranger.

Mrs. Spellman followed Mrs. Bradley out to the carriage and in her inimitable way expressed her gratitude for the timely contribution. The joy of her Irish soul lighted her countenance as she said:

"Shure, mum, it's the loikes av yersilf that makes loif wort' livin'."

"I dont know about that," said Mrs. Bradley.

"Oh, go way wid yer blarney!" exclaimed the

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woman. "Ye know it's the trut' Oi'm tellin' yees. And phat's that Oi hurud about yer good man? God bliss 'im! Pat tells me he have been apinted prisident av the timperence saciety."

"Mr. Bradley has been elected representative of the town, if that is what you mean. And I am sure that he will do all in his power to prevent liquor being sold. There are already too many families in poverty on account of men drinking up their earnings. Even Pat, as good as he is, would be better off without his toddy."

In spite of Mrs. Bradley's kindness and generosity, the wife objected to hearing her spouse criticised. The expression of pleasure and the deferential manner of the woman instantly changed, and she said, with considerable emphasis:

"Niver a wourd will Oi hear about Pat Spellman! Shure the Holy Mother knows Oi tuck him for bither or wourse, and dthrink or no dthrink, he's an hanast man. And tha's more'n can be said av many a progidunt phat Oi've seen dronin' round wid a face an as lang as yer arum and at the same toime hatchin' up some boggle to chate his neighbors out av their oie-taath."

When well out of hearing Mrs. Bradley said:

"I ought not to have mentioned Pat's weakness to Mary Ann. Though she upbraids him unmercifully herself, she seriously objects to having any allusion to his failings made by others. If I do say it, I think he would be different if he had a more gentle companion. You must have seen, Miss

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Winn, that he is very kind-hearted, and his good humor will cure a case of blues sooner than any other known remedy."

Rachel quite agreed with her. Many a time when the girl was on the point of crying with homesickness Pat's original sayings dispelled her gloom and brought forth peals of laughter from her. It was no unusual thing to see the driver on the veranda spinning his yarns while waiting for the mail coach, or perhaps to do some little chore for the busy landlady. One night a pompous young man, a late arrival, thinking to be very patronizing, said to him:

"I take it that you came from the old country."

"Faith, it was in Ireland that Oi was bornd," said Pat. "But Oi could 'av been bornd in Ameriky just as well."

"How was that?" queried the guest.

"Oh, that's as plain as the nose on yer face, but we furiners have a few sacrets phat wa ain't wearin' on our schlaves."

Without further comment the upstart thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered down the road.

When Mr. Bradley asked Pat how much Lawyer Ripley paid him for gathering his apples, his reply was:

"Faix, Oi don't remimber just how much it was, but phativer he paid me he chated me out av."

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With Mrs. Spellman's nervous temperament, it was not strange that she was subject to attacks of hysteria. Doctor Pendleton was frequently called upon such occasions. One time when he arrived at the unkempt home he found Pat nearly as badly off as his wife. He was in a frenzy of fear lest she was going mad. As the woman went on crying and laughing alternately, he exclaimed:

"For the love av the saints, Mary Ann, will ye niver come to yer sinces? Shure, ye act the most loike a fool Oi iver seen yees!" When told by the physician that the woman's illness was largely due to imagination, Pat said: "Holy Mither! If that's phat ye call it, thin bad scrans to Mag Nasons!"

While driving along the brink of Glen River one day, a gentleman in the party asked Pat if he ever fished on that stream.

"Shure Oi have that, yer honor, and aizy fishin' indade it was, wid niver a bite barin' wan from a muskater that tuck the top av me ear clean aff at the first lick."

The passengers, except a lone spinster who had a horror of spiders, bugs and bumblebees, smiled audibly. She shivered and drew her veil closer about her face. The others had heard too many of Pat's yarns to accept them without a grain of seasoning. Mention of the noisome insects reminded him of an unpleasant experience which he once had while guiding a Boston naturalist through the mountains, and he said:

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"Talk about muskaters! These around here ain't to be schpoken av in the same day wid the wans an Sout' Mountain!" He then proceeded to give a detailed account of his wanderings through the woods, of getting lost, and of spending the night beneath an old caldron kettle that had been left by sugar makers. "Yis," said the story-teller, "the perfisser shuck loike an aspect leaf whin he hurud the noisy cratures pipin' up wid their evenin' chunes. The first wan was no more than complated whin he stoirted wid a confission. Shure, Oi told 'im Oi was no prast phativer, but he kipt roight an wid his blarney. Since this company have no acquaintance wid the gintleman there can be no harum in sayin' that among ather things too indacent to repate he confissed to sthalin a quarter out av his ould grandmother's sthockin'! Whin he rached that pint the bill av the largest varmint av the lat come trough the old kittle and stuck straight into his back. Holy Mither! Phat a howl wint up! Oi suppose he t'ought it was the ghost av the old lady afther him wid a rid-hot poker."

"You must have been at your wits' end to know what to do," said Doctor Manser, who always sat with the driver.

"Faix," said Pat, "Oi paid little attintion to the ind av me wits, but belave me, the inds av thim blatherin' bills was headed down an the insoide av that ould caldron in less toime than it takes to tell about it."

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"I suppose you had no further trouble," commented the doctor.

"Roight ye are, soir. It was just at the break o' day whin Oi hurud a flutterin' av wings. Thinkin' it was a flock av wild geese goin' sout', Oi turned over and wint to schlape. And would ye belave me, before Oi waked up thim muskaters flew aff and tuck the ould kittle wid 'em." There was no time for comment for, turning to the doctor, Pat said: "Ye orter been wid me wan day last season whin Oi fished up Pike Stream."

"Why so?" queried the doctor.

"Ye'd av seen a soight the likes av phat ye wouldn't lay yer eyes an ag'in in a loife-time."

"Since that was the case, you had better tell us about it. What was it?"

"That's precoisely the quistion Oi axed mesilf. Thin Oi said, says Oi, 'Pat Spellman, don't ye be afther lavin' these diggin' widout makin' yersilf wise to that onnatural thing.' So Oi relaved mesilf av the most av me clo'es and climbed up the bare face av a lidge. And phat should Oi find but a woodchuck's hole ten feet long stickin' straight out av the bank."

The truth of Pat's statement was not questioned, for at that moment a man with a hand organ and monkey came out from a thicket beside the road. The horses were inclined to shy, but Pat stopped long enough to hear "The Wearing of the Green" played, and to see the wise little creature perform some of his antics. It is doubt-

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ful if the Hibernian ever saw a monkey before. In any case, he winked at the doctor and said:

"If that ain't wan av the O'Houligan b'ys from Cork, thin Oi'll eat me head."

Poor Pat! It was only the next day that he came to grief. After imbibing too freely with friends that he met in Barton, he lost control of his horses and they ran away with him. His right leg was so seriously injured that amputation was necessary. In spite of his failings, everybody was fond of Pat, and without the least hesitancy the villagers turned to and cared for him and his family. Be it said to his credit, however, he signed the pledge two days after the accident, and never tasted liquor again. The erstwhile erratic Mary Ann became as gentle toward him as need be. The neighbors declared that she was prouder of him hobbling around on an old wooden stump than she ever was before. She said to Grandma Bradley:

"Oi find that it's not laigs altogither phat makes a man. Wid the wan left Pat is more av a gintleman than he was wid the two av 'em. Shure, if he should lose the ather wan Oi don't know but he'd be fit for prisidint av the United States."

Paradoxical as it may seem, the accident proved the beginning of the man's prosperity. The climax of his good fortune came when through the death of an uncle he was left a goodly sum of ready money.

"Why," said Grandma Bradley in telling about

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it five years later, "the whole townspeople were as pleased with Pat's good luck as if it had been their own."

The happiness of the household was completed, however, by an old stork that had been nesting among the spokes of Dame Fortune's wheel for nobody knows how long. One night it came down from its perch and left a beautiful girl baby for Pat and his Mary Ann.

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CHAPTER X

THE MINER'S STORY

One evening during a September gale, Miss Dinsmore, a guest at the inn, proposed having a fagot party. Mr. Pelton, the village schoolmaster, remarked:

"I wonder what kind of a party that is!"

Miss Dinsmore made no explanation, but when a bundle of twigs was brought from the wood-shed she distributed them among the guests who sat around the fire on the hearth, and said:

"You must each, in turn, cast your twig into the flames, and while it is being consumed either repeat a poem, sing a song, or tell a story."

Paul Sibley from Chicago was the first to replenish the fire, after which he rose, strode into the parlor, and struck two or three chords at random on the piano. Rachel Winn said:

"Perhaps he will give us 'Captain Jinks.'"

Miss Gilman who sat next to her remarked:

"I hope he will sing 'Pins and Needles by the Dozen.'"

They were both widely off the mark. In his despondency at the thought of leaving Dorothy Quimby, the minister's daughter, with whom he had fallen desperately in love, he was not in a

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mood for comic songs. And his rich tenor voice resounded through the halls in "Maid of Athens."

Though the gentleman present made no comment, they exchanged knowing glances and a smile went round.

Grandma Bradley was the next to contribute her fagot to the fire. They all wondered whether she would repeat a hymn, or some passage of Scripture. To their surprise she sang, in a low, sweet voice:

"Roll on, silver moon, guide the traveler his way
While the nightingale's song is in tune,
For I never, never more with my true love shall stray
In the sweet silver light of the moon."

An elderly lady from Dixville, who was visiting the family, quoted:

"He liveth long who liveth well,
All else is life but flung away.
He liveth longest who can tell
Of some true thing truly done each day."

Miss Gilman gave Hannah Moore's lines:

"Alone I walked upon the strand,
A pearly shell was in my hand"

As burning of fagots was part of the program, Rachel Winn thought something from the "Fire Worshipers" would be apropos to the occasion. So while her branch was crackling in the flames she repeated:

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" 'Tis moonlight over Oman's sea;
Her banks of pearl and palmy isles
Bask in the night-beams beauteously,
And her blue waters sleep in smiles."

Mr. Cameron, Grandma Bradley's son-in-law from Denver, sat near Rachel, and was the next to contribute to the flames, but he begged to be excused from giving a recitation.

" Indeed, we cannot excuse you," said Miss Dinsmore. " You, too, must contribute to the cluster of gems."

The inn-keeper came in at that moment and declared that one of Mr. Cameron's mining stories would be in keeping with the wild night. Seeing that by no manner of means would the company be put off, Mr. Cameron began by saying:

" Four years' service in the Civil War inspired me with a desire for further adventure, and there seemed no better place to find it than out in the gold fields of California. I thought I had seen all kinds of men, but when I came in contact with those miners I found that I was mistaken. There was still another type.

" My first venture was made at Hang Town, Dead Man's Canyon. I took up an old claim and did very well till the drought came on. The mines through that section depend upon the rain for water. If we had a rainy winter they could be worked seven or eight months; if not, they were useless.

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"The first real desperado that I fell in with was Jim Snow, a half-breed, He was a good banjo-player, a fine singer, an expert at cards and altogether a hail-fellow-well-met. I became acquainted with him on the coach going over the mountains from Hang Town to Shingle Springs. That was a station at the end of a branch road running out from Sacramento into the pine country. He told a pathetic tale about his wife being ill in Mexico, and that he had no money to pay his fare home. I, like some unsophisticated youth, was all sympathy and bought his ticket to San Francisco, and intended to pay his fare to Mexico. And thereby hangs a tale:—

"When Shingle Springs was reached an officer stepped up to me, and asked to see me alone. Once by ourselves, he said:

"'Are you aware of whom you have for a companion?'

"'To be sure,' I replied. 'His name is Snow.'

"'He is a stage-robber,' declared the officer. 'And I suspect that he robbed the sluicers at Pizaro's place two weeks ago!'

"Thereupon he took the man in hand and searched his valise. Finding nothing that would lead to suspicion, he set him free. Seeing that the suave gentleman paled under the scrutinizing gaze of the officer, it occurred to me that he put a bundle into my trunk that morning. I mentioned the fact to the servant of the law, and he lost no

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time in examining its contents. You can scarcely imagine my feelings when it was found that the package contained between seven and eight thousand dollars' worth of gold dust. Snow scented mischief, and disappeared into the forest. I was so vexed with having been duped by the rascal that I put my trunk into a miner's cabin and with the officer and two other men started in pursuit of him. After two days' unsuccessful search we returned, and I never saw the desperado again till the last of February, '71, about a month before Chris Lopez, the noted bandit, was shot."

The guests of the inn listened with breathless interest as Mr. Cameron went on to say:

"It was in the fall of '70 that I went into the San Gabriel Canyon. Thirty-two men accompanied me, of whom fourteen were Spaniards, seven were Chinese and the rest were nearly all Americans of the hardest type. Among them were Tom Burns, Bogus Smith, Bill Dooley, Sam Hickman, and French Joe who, with a pretty girl and her child, took up his abode in an old shack just across the river from our cabin." In describing some of those men Mr. Cameron said: "Burns was of medium height with no surplus flesh. His hair, coal-black, was as straight as that of an Indian. His piercing black eyes, sunk deeply into their sockets, resembled bits of ebony in a bronze setting, while two of his front teeth were conspicuous for their absence. Bogus Smith was tall, well proportioned, and had the

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strength of a Hercules. His coarse, red-brown hair fell in abundance over his forehead. His eyes were steel-grey, and his mouth, somewhat small, enclosed a set of teeth that were perfect except for discoloration from excessive use of tobacco." Mr. Cameron hesitated and turning to Grandma Bradley said: "I am afraid that I shall shock the young ladies if I go on with this story."

"Nonsense, Nathan," she replied. "Instead of shocking them it will broaden their sympathies to hear something of the lives of those less fortunate than themselves."

Taking up the thread of his story Mr. Cameron went on, saying:

"Burns was wanted for murder committed while robbing a man at Los Gadus. Although he evaded punishment by law, justice was meted out to him at the hands of Bogus Smith who in a fit of anger struck him down about a month after we went into camp."

Miss Gilman gave a start and exclaimed: "What, did that Mr. Smith really kill him?"

"Certainly, a man's life doesn't count for much with such characters.

"Apropos to Chris Lopez," said the story-teller, "it was about twelve o'clock one night that we were aroused by tramping of horses and rattling of spurs. I looked out and saw that the cabin was surrounded by a posse of bandits. Upon opening the door Joe Vasquez, their leader, and Lopez,

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his lieutenant, walked in. Vasquez asked if I were in charge. When told that I was, he drew his revolver and said:

"'We want something to eat and we want it damned quick!'

"It goes without saying that I made no delay in calling the chef. He rehearsed a few oaths about getting up at that hour to feed the sons-of-sea-cooks. Upon hearing a revolver drop, Vasquez turned to me and said:

"'Sir, I shall hold you responsible if any trouble occurs. We've come here for grub, and we're going to have it.'

"I opened the door of the sleeping-room," said the narrator, "and found the men up and armed with their repeaters. Upon being told who our uninvited guests were, they quietly crept back into their bunks. The hot lunch finally ready, it was found that there was only room for half of the party to eat at one time. When they were through the others came in. Who should be among them but the notorious Jim Snow. He said to me:

"'I've seen you before.' Then, turning to his companions, he made some remark in Spanish. Calling me to the rear of the cabin he said, in an undertone: 'Now, pard, if you will come with us you needn't want for money. We're going to retire within four or five months. We robbed the stores at Trespass last week, and to-night we shall

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do up Gospel Swamp.' Then he said, 'You must have considerable gold dust on hand.'

"'We haven't cleaned up for over two weeks,' I replied, 'and lately our clean-ups have been small.'

"'That's an old story,' said Snow. 'Only a tenderfoot would expect me to be caught by such chaff.' He then informed me that one of my men kept him posted regarding matters in our camp. By that time the others were ready to proceed on their errand of plunder, and calling to him, they rode away."

Drawing her chair closer to Mr. Cameron's, Grandma Bradley exclaimed:

"Oh, what dreadful creatures! And to think, Nathan, that you were at their mercy."

Without seeming to hear her he continued, saying:

"They couldn't have gone more than ten rods before my men were up and down the trail after them. I soon heard firing and the crashing of boulders. The men came in about daybreak and said that they fired at the villains while they were crossing the river about three miles below the North Fork. I didn't put much stock in their story, but from what a miner told me who came in two days later, there was no doubt but some of the bandits were disabled by the onslaught.

"After that the men settled down to work and everything was, apparently, all right. Still, I kept wondering who was playing the Judas. I

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was in company with John McKay at that time. We were suspicious that the bedrock of our sluicers had been removed and the tracks of the thief had been covered by letting on a stream of water. One night after supper I told McKay that we should have a big clean-up in the morning, and that if he would take the watch at the head of the sluicer till twelve o'clock I would relieve him then.

"The moon was bright, so I didn't light up," said the story-teller. "About half past eleven some one peeped in at the window. I looked out and who should be hurrying down the canyon but French Joe. I took my rifle, stole out of the cabin, went up near the sluicer and met McKay. We had scarcely concealed ourselves behind a clump of bushes when we heard a low whistle. It was immediately answered by some one on the other side of the river. French Joe told his accomplice to turn on two or three inches of water. "'By the time it gets down here,' said he, 'I'll be through.'

"We let him get to work. After he had filled his gold pan and replaced the bedrock, McKay took aim and fired. We saw him drop and waited for the other man to make his appearance. He evidently scented powder, and sought shelter among the boulders. The next morning found every man at his work except French Joe. We sent over to find why he didn't come; the man brought back word that he had met with an acci-

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dent and wouldn't be around for a day or two. Though the shooting was done to protect our property," said Mr. Cameron, "it is a deed which has always weighed heavily upon McKay's conscience. French Joe died within a month afterwards, and left the young girl and her child homeless."

"Poor thing," said half a dozen of the listeners in the same breath.

"After his death the question arose, what should be done with the girl and her 'kid,' as the child was called by the miners. We knew that for several weeks the river would be too high for them to leave the canyon. You may have read about the San Gabriel River, which has a fall of two hundred and fifty feet to the mile. On account of its having many short curves, and having to be crossed more than a hundred times in going a distance of fifteen miles, the stream is nearly impassable in the rainy season. However, while McKay and I were making plans to care for the girl, illness decreed her fate. She was stricken down with fever and lived only a few days."

At that juncture of the story, Grandma Bradley was seen to wipe away the tears that were bound to come to her eyes.

"When all was over with the mother," Mr. Cameron went on to say, "we took the child to the cabin. The little fellow cried for her more or less at first but, childlike, was soon pacified. He amused himself day by day with chipmunks that

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came and ate crumbs from his hand. The cook soon became very fond of the youngster. I often wondered if it were memories of the man's childhood, or if it were thoughts of his own little ones that brought the tears which frequently fell upon the cheeks of the sleeping boy." With a tremor in his voice the grey-haired Westerner said: "The little fellow certainly was attractive. His large dark eyes were shaded by long lashes, his cheeks were like roses, and every hair of his abundant ringlets was like a thread of shining gold."

"Another stray pearl," Miss Dinsmore remarked.

"About a week after French Joe was taken away," said Mr. Cameron, "we heard that Vasquez and his followers had stolen nine horses and had killed a Mexican by the name of Pedro. Also that they were lying in wait for us. McKay and I didn't propose to be caught napping. With some of our most trustworthy men we started out to find the marauders. After following their trail three days, their hiding place was disclosed by blue smoke curling up from the mountain-side. Fortunately, we came upon them unawares. Lopez, more courageous than his leader, crept stealthily through the tall grass till he was within twenty feet of us. When he arose shots were exchanged, and he dropped to the ground. Vasquez made good his escape into the forest, and the rest of the gang lost no time in following his cowardly example.

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"To go back to what I was saying about the child: when we were about to leave the canyon the question arose, who should have him. Some suggested that he belonged to the owners of the camp, others said that the cook had the best right to him. Bogus Smith, who had never shown the least interest in the little fellow, was heard to say:

"'I mean to have that "kid." I can git big money for him in Frisco.'

"There was so much talk about it," said the narrator, "that McKay and I decided the drawing of lots to be the only satisfactory way of settling the matter. The method suggested was to place several sticks of different lengths upon the table and let each draw one. This was to be done three times in succession; the one getting the shortest piece every time should be the winner. Bogus Smith was always officious,— he offered to cut the sticks. As chance would have it, the cook won. In a trice Bogus, unseen by the others, separated his stick, which was in two sections, and dropping a part of it into his sleeve, held up a shorter piece than any of the others. Though the men well knew that he had played some trick, they were still divided in opinion as to whom the child should be given."

With every word the listeners became more and more interested. Grandma Bradley caught Mr. Cameron by the sleeve and said:

"Why, Nathan, you don't mean to tell me that

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you allowed that wretch to have the child?"

"No, mother," he replied, "the matter was decided by a power beyond man to control. There had been a scarlet spot on either cheek of the boy for two or three days; he had eaten little, and was restless in his sleep. That very night after those ruffians quarreled about the right of ownership he grew worse, and just as the first flush of morning kissed the mountain-tops his spirit passed out.

"When one of the men died from accident or otherwise we were not at a loss to know how to dispose of his remains. But when that innocent child was taken away we thought it merited a different burial from what was given lawless criminals.

For want of something better we wrapped the delicate, waxen figure in an old piece of linen and placed it in a plain wooden box. Accompanied by every man in camp except Smith, we buried the boy beside his mother beneath the sheltering branches of an oak. Though the souls of those men were smirched with many a crime, there was not one among them whose eyes were not dimmed with tears when we turned away from the grave of our little comrade."

"I was hoping that that miserable Smith would come in for his share of punishment," said Mr. Pelton.

"We left that for a higher power," said Mr. Cameron. Then he quoted:

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"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."

Rachel Winn was very courageous when, with Miss Dinsmore and Miss Gilman, she went upstairs that night. But upon being left alone, she hurriedly bolted her door, fastened the windows securely, and drew the shades. She felt as if some robber was about to pounce upon her, either from under the bed or from the closet, which was a portable affair consisting of a broad shelf with a figured cretonne curtain in front of it.

"What, did that drapery move?" she thought. It seemed to the girl as if every hair of her head stood on end. Upon going to the closet and finding nothing but her articles of wearing apparel, she gained sufficient courage to look under the bed. She found nothing there, however, but an old cheesecloth duster which had been dropped by the chambermaid. Thereupon Rachel retired, but to say that she had the sleep of the blest would be far from the truth. She dreamed of towering mountains, of deep gorges through which rivers dashed from crag to crag. To cap all, the place seemed to be inhabited by desperadoes similar to those of whom she had so recently heard. Thankful, indeed, was she upon waking to find that the personages of her dreams,

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together with the terrible storm, had passed into nothingness.

It was a glorious morning. The river banks were tufted with late golden-rod, purpling wild asters and red strawberry vines. On the hillside beyond pale yellow birches, flaming sumacs, silver poplars and evergreen trees mingled in a symphony of coloring.

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CHAPTER XI

THE HUSKING

With the Indian summer came corn huskings and apple bees. Major Hicks, who lived on the southerly slope of Ripton Hill, was noted for getting his harvesting done two weeks earlier than those who lived on the meadows. He had the first husking of the season. A general invitation, which included both the villagers and the neighboring farmers, was given out. Through the kindness of the artist at the inn and Dorcas Pendleton, with whom Rachel Winn went to the circus, she was privileged to have another glimpse of the joys of rural life.

The sun, like a ball of fire, crimsoned the horizon as the young people sauntered up the hillside. Some were hand in hand, others looked for four-leaf clover, or lingered at the cold spring where they refreshed themselves with its limpid waters. While they watched the crystal fountain boiling out of the shining sand, teams slowly zigzagged from one side of the road to the other and stopped now and again to rest. Who should be in one of the carriages but the bride and groom whose marriage ceremony Rachel witnessed on the morning of circus-day.

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Just as they passed the young man remarked:

"Wa'al, Betsy, the' ain't no use in talkin', if the pertaters on the burnt lot don't turn aout fust class you won't git a fore-room stove this winter. That's as true as you're a foot high."

The young woman's waist was no longer encircled by the arm of her spouse. He held the reins in one hand, in the other one he carried the whip with which he snipped the blossoms from sedge-grass that grew in tufts by the roadside. Dorcas Pendleton remarked that their honeymoon must be on the wane.

Flickering lights above the wide open barn doors greeted the guests. Deep bays on either side were stacked to the eaves with fragrant herds-grass, and scaffolds above the stables were piled high with sheaves of wheat and trembling oats just ready for threshing. The great barn was lighted from end to end with lanterns which swayed in the breeze and cast long shadows upon the merry company. Nimbly flew the busy fingers till every silken sheath had been despoiled of its treasure. At sight of a red ear the roof resounded with laughter and the finder was compelled to pay a forfeit.

The natives well knew that, the husking over, a sumptuous repast awaited them. Plans for their further entertainment were a secret known only to Major Hicks and his wife. It might have been half past nine, or perhaps it was ten o'clock, when supper was announced.

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The gorgeous decorations of the dining-room so completely absorbed the attention of everyone that they nearly forgot the savory food before them. The immense fireplace was banked with late golden-rod, delicate frost-flowers and purpling wild asters, and cluster upon cluster of crimson sumac blossoms was piled upon the dark mantel. From each corner of the room ropes of evergreen came to the centre and were fastened to the ceiling with branches of flaming maple. A deer's head, decorated with ferns and trailing partridge vines bright with scarlet berries, adorned the space above the sideboard.

As to the rich repast, one couldn't refrain from repeating the old saying: "The tables groaned under the weight of good things." There were baked beans in plenty and brown bread, the like of which was never cooked except in a brick oven. Then the home-cured ham with the breath of smoke still upon it and the thinly sliced tongue, cooked to a turn, were a feast in themselves, to say nothing of the hot rolls that just melted in one's mouth. What should come next but baked Indian pudding, piping hot and swimming in cream. That was followed by mince, apple, and pumpkin pie with sage cheese for trimmings. Then baskets piled high with delicate greenings, nut-brown russets and rosy-cheeked pippins were passed round. And new cider was served as freely as water.

The feast over, the host conducted his guests

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out through a long walk and up a winding staircase to a hall above the granary. The newly laid floor was fragrant with aroma of pine, and ropes of evergreen that adorned the rafters of the unfinished roof were sweet with the breath of the forest. Though the neighbors had heard considerable hammering, they never suspected that the major was preparing a dance-hall. Old Jimmie Pike and his third wife, who occupied a dilapidated house down by the river, had heard more or less pounding going on for a month or more, but neither of them could locate the sound. The old man was deaf in his right ear and his wife was similarly afflicted with her left one, so they rarely agreed upon the direction whence noises came. The night before the husking the old fellow was a little "over the bay" and unusually garrulous. He insisted that the noise came from across the river where the Hartwell boys were splitting logs. The old lady, with equal assurance, declared that it came from the Hicks's. It was never known how the matter was settled, but Farmer Miller said:

"The' ain't no doubt but Mirandy carried the day. She usually holts her own in an argimunt."

Dancing was most agreeable to the young people. They could scarcely wait for the major to tune his violin. A quadrille was the first figure. The young men and women, and even the older ones, made no delay in forming sets. All being

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in readiness, the major, who was both musician and prompter, called out in a sonorous voice:

"All balance to partners, right hand to partners, balance there, left hand back," and so on, till every change was completed. Virginia reel came next in order. That was followed by round dances. Rachel Winn was pleased with that announcement, but by the time she had been around the hall two or three times with Job Gilson her ardor was somewhat dampened. Job could repeat the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelations, and Shakespeare's writings were as familiar to him as a, b, c, to a schoolboy, but in the terpsichorean art his education had been sadly neglected. That "a full head has a close mouth" Rachel didn't question. However, Job did vouchsafe one remark to her during their gyrations around the hall. He said:

"This is the first time that I've tackled this nonsense, and you bet it'll be the last, the way the sweat is wiltin' down my Sunday collar."

Next came a quadrille which Rachel danced with a young man from Norwood, who was at home from college on his vacation. Doubtless he had forgotten the names of all farming utensils. Be that as it may, he certainly had developed a superabundance of self-assurance. He remarked:

"This is awfully nice to be privileged to dance with one who so well understands the art. In fact, I am grateful for any respite from the monotony

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of Norwood. It seems so provincial, don-cher-know."

Just then Mr. Hicks called out:

"Eight hands round." Thus the upstart was prevented from making further conversation till one of the violin strings had to be adjusted. Then, dropping his head to one side, and crossing his hands as if to have his picture taken, he said to Rachel:

"Beg pardon, but I didn't get your name."

"Oh, didn't you? Why, it never occurred to me that you would want it."

"But really, I am all at sea as to what to call you. May it be Brown, Jones or Robinson?"

"Neither," Rachel replied. And thinking to have a little sport she said, "White, if you please."

"Ah! And may I ask where you came from, Miss White?"

"From Barton," was the quick reply.

"Barton," he ejaculated. "But where did you learn to dance?"

"Why, at home, to be sure."

Of course, the pompous youth took that with a grain of salt. When he referred to Dorcas Pendleton for information she gave him an evasive answer.

The townspeople were fond of Farmer Hicks and his wife. It was with regret that they heard him say:

"While the others are taking breath Rhoda,

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my daughter, will give a little exhibition of waltzing."

Unfortunately, the daughter was neither tall like her father, nor plump and rosy like her mother. In fact, it would be difficult for one to describe the girl. To say that she had a sylphlike figure and the grace of a princess would be to prevaricate. A feather bed with a string tied around the middle would simulate her shape more nearly than anything else that comes to mind.

"Yes," said the major, when the artist from the inn congratulated him on Rhoda's accomplishments, "she likes to dance as well as her old dad likes to fiddle." Then he played faster than ever.

The question arose, would the girl faint from exhaustion, or would she continue the strenuous exercise till nothing was left of her but the blue ribbon that held her corkscrew curls in place? Rachel Winn was nearly convulsed with laughter at the ridiculous figure which the girl presented, but well knew that her good reputation in Old Riverby would be lost for all time if she ventured to smile. She saw by the twinkle in the artist's eye that he, too, was struggling for mastery over the humorous side of his nature.

"What," said he to Dorcas and Rachel, "is it not a little close here? I think a whiff of fresh air would do us all good."

When they returned to the hall the major had just finished playing the "Blue Danube" waltz. Uncle Rufus Giles said:

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"Come, Major, give us a jig." Thereupon the musician started off in full tilt with the "Fisher's Hornpipe."

Inspired by the hilarity of the girls and boys, the vigor of youth returned to Uncle Rufus, and he danced like a lad of sixteen. Billie Benson, as the old gate-tender at Barton was called, caught the spirit and exclaimed:

"I'll be jiggered if I'm goin' to be outdone by any Old Riverby chap! Give us 'Money Musk,' Major, and I'll see what I can do with shakin' a huff."

That the fires of youth still burned within the old man was evident. The tattoo of his heels upon the floor, the graceful pose of his body, and the double-shuffle, done with perfect ease, were a delight to all. Widow Branscom watched every step with interest. When the dancer completed the last measure, he caught her by the hand, and said:

"Now, Jane, give us the pigeonwing the same as you used to forty years ago."

"Yes, yes, do, Mrs. Branscom," came from all parts of the hall. She declined to comply with the request, but almost unconsciously she began taking the steps. Rich color came to her cheeks, and her dark eyes lit up with unusual brightness as she seemed to be transported back to her girlhood.

Farmer Gove from Glen River nudged the artist, and said:

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"That's goin' some, Mister! It don't seem only yesterday sence Widder Jane was a gal, and a master harnsome one she was, and no mistake! I've had a good deal of sympathy for her ever sence her man died. I know how dog-gone lonesome 'tis not to hev a soul to speak to when night comes. Gee whiz! I could write a book 'bout what I've suffered sence Marthy died."

"Why on earth don't you propose to the widow?" queried the artist.

"Perpose? That's the durned of it," said Mr. Gove. "I've harnessed old White-foot more'n once to come down and ask her to keep house for me, but 'fore I'd git half-way to the village my courage'd fail and I'd turn the hoss round and go back home, lonesomer'n ever."

Mr. Gove was not the only one interested in Widow Branscom. Just behind him stood Doctor Kempton from Norwood, and Deacon Jones of Old Riverby, who dropped in to see the dancers. They were both single men. The deacon was heard to say:

"Well, Doc, I'm surprised that you haven't discovered Mrs. Branscom's good points before this and taken her for a helpmate."

"You are, are you?" said the doctor. "Well, I've thought the same thing about a certain deacon that doesn't live more than forty miles from here."

"Have, have you? Ha, ha! Well, no one would ever come up with my Nancy, so I plan

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on letting things slide along the same as they have for the past ten years."

As the last pirouette of the figure was given, one of the violin strings broke and the whole company began singing, "We Won't Go Home till Morning."

However much of truth there was in the deacon's statement that no one could fill the place of his old love, he was the first to leave the hall in expectation of taking Widow Branscom home. While he was unhitching his horse and selecting suitable words with which to clothe a proposal of marriage, the wise old doctor was shaking her hand cordially and congratulating her upon her youthful appearance. The flush that came to her cheeks evinced the joy which his words brought to her lonely heart.

If the truth may be told, Doctor Kempton was one of her old beaux. It would be needless to add that he made no haste as he drove down Ripton Hill with Mrs. Branscom snugly tucked in beside him. But it would be no harm to mention that in less than a month after the husking "Widder Jane" ceased to be and Doctor Kempton's wife was busy making her winter's supply of delicacies for the table.

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CHAPTER XII

THE LITTLE WAIF

Rachel Winn spent many an afternoon in Grandma Bradley's room. One day the old lady rose hurriedly, peered over her spectacles at the passing coach, and said:

"I believe that is Elsie Brodeur on the front seat."

"And who is she, pray tell me?" Rachel asked.

"Why, she is the wife of Doctor Kendal of New York, but in spite of the fact that their marriage took place ten years and more ago, I still find myself calling her by her maiden name. Yes, Elsie Brodeur has had a real story-book life." That was sufficient to rouse Rachel's curiosity, and she exclaimed in girlish excitement:

"Oh, do tell me about it!"

The good woman despised anything that savored of gossip, still she delighted in relating strange incidents in the lives of Old Riverby people. Why should she not have a fund of such information, since she had always lived there, with the exception of two years spent at Norwood Academy?

It was nearly four o'clock. The shadows of the elms across the road had begun to lengthen when the white-haired woman measured the stock-

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ing leg upon which she was knitting, rolled it up neatly, and remarked:

"I never could do more than one thing at a time, so if I am to tell you about the strange happenings in Elsie's childhood the knitting will have to go till another day."

"It is too bad to neglect your work," Rachel said. At the same time she thought how much worse it would be if she had to wait for the story.

After wiping her spectacles and carefully adjusting them, the woman began by saying:

"Brodeur was not a pleasing name to John Norton, Elsie's grandfather, who was English to the backbone, and who looked upon the French people as a frivolous set. It was a good many years ago that the Nortons settled here. Mr. Norton was a sober, industrious man, a blacksmith by trade. His wife was a thrifty woman, but with their four lusty boys and one daughter to support, they found it a hard matter to make both ends meet, so to speak. The result was that as soon as each boy was able to earn a dollar or two a month he was let out to some farmer. The father declared, however, that in any case Alice, the daughter, should not leave home. Nevertheless, when a lucrative position was offered her at a tavern in York State, she persuaded her father to let her accept it.

"A letter which Alice wrote home soon after she went away told of Jack Preston being desperately in love with her. She described him as six

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feet three in height, very slight in build, and as having freckles upon his face that resembled the spots on a trout's back. Though she expatiated at length upon the looks of her would-be-lover, she carefully concealed the fact that the son of a wealthy fur-dealer from Canada was equally fond of her."

"Perhaps she cared for him," Rachel ventured to say.

"So it proved."

"And did he marry her?"

"Yes, and if the truth may be told, the poor girl soon died of a broken heart."

"Why, what caused her sorrow?"

Without seeming to hear Rachel, the woman went on, saying:

"It was from Mira Barstow, an old friend of mine who attended school at Norwood at the time I did, that I heard of the misfortunes of the aristocratic Canadian and his girl-wife. Then I little dreamed that she was our neighbor's daughter."

"How strange!" Rachel ejaculated.

In explanation the story-teller continued, saying:

"My friend was an attractive girl. She married Joe Redmon, a worthless fellow, and went to Canada to live. Her father bitterly opposed the match, and immediately made a will which cut Mira off from all right to his property. After the death of her husband five years later, she was

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obliged to earn her own living. It was then that she found employment as seamstress or nurse, as the case required, with the Brodeurs, a wealthy family in Quebec. Still she kept her little home at Four Corners, a small settlement some five miles away.

"I hadn't heard from Mrs. Redmon for years," said the narrator, "in fact I scarcely knew whether or not she was living, when one day, greatly to my surprise, I received a letter from her. The first pages were reminiscences of our schooldays. Then came an account of misfortunes which had befallen her since last we met. That was followed by a pathetic story of a young man and woman whose lives were being sacrificed on account of family pride."

Instead of relating the story, the aged woman went to an old mahogany secretary and took out a package of letters. As she untied them and looked them over one by one, her eyes filled with tears. The last two were from her girlhood friend. Passing one of them to Rachel she said:

"Read the sad tale for yourself."

In the first missive Mrs. Redmon said that her employer's son had secretly married a hotel waitress. Then came a detailed account of the stormy interview between the young man and his father when the latter heard of the marriage, also of the young man's illness occasioned by the quarrel. Mrs. Redmon closed by saying that the girl-wife was coming to remain with her till other

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arrangements could be made. When Rachel finished reading the first letter Grandma Bradley said:

"You must know that I was very anxious to hear how the affair ended. It was months before I received another word. I began to think that I should never hear from Mira again when this came." She handed Rachel another letter which told of the arrival of Jean Brodeur's wife at Four Corners, of what the gossiping neighbors had to say about her, and of her death which occurred two months later. Much was said of the young woman's pleasure in fashioning garments for the little stranger that was soon expected. Following that, the writer went on to say:

"Alas for human hopes! Another harrowing interview between Mr. Brodeur and his son brought on a relapse of fever from which the young man never recovered. Immediately after Jean's death his wife went to Montreal, where their child was born, and where the young mother soon passed away.

"While packing up the belongings of the dead woman I found letters from her husband, also their marriage certificate. Upon the back of the important document was the name and address of her father. The last offices having been performed for the mother, I was at a loss to know what to do with the infant daughter that survived her. I thought of my own little one that passed on years ago, and my heart was so touched with pity that

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I brought the child home with me. To my face my neighbors say: 'How sweet of you to take such a care upon yourself.' Behind my back it is quite another story. But don't pity me, Martha," the writer went on, "criticism, however unkind, cannot rob me of the happiness that I find in this motherless babe."

"Poor Mira," said grandma, with a sigh, "I never heard from her again."

"What a strange ending of the romance," Rachel thought, but she made no comment. Finally the woman resumed the telling of her story by saying:

"Something like eight years later a little girl, unaccompanied by any one, was sent down on the train from Quebec and was put off at Barton. Either from fear or from loneliness at finding no one at the station, she sat down on the doorsill and cried herself to sleep.

"I well remember that cold, bleak day," said the narrator. "The October frosts had already tinted the meadows brown, the golden-rod and wild asters had lost their bright coloring, and the crickets had ceased to sing except for a few belated ones that gave an occasional chirp. Why, even now it saddens me to think of that child left alone in such a desolate place. Fortunately, some one wanted to take the midnight train going north. Except for that, the little waif would have remained there all night, or perhaps have been carried off by some wild animal."

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"Oh, how perfectly dreadful!" Rachel exclaimed. "What ever became of her?"

"You know," said grandma, "the Good Book says, 'Not a sparrow falleth.'"

"Yes," Rachel replied, with the air of a full-fledged theologian. "But there are not many who are interested in other people's children!"

"Too true," said grandma with a sigh. "But naturally Mr. Tilton, the station agent, woke the child and carried her home with him. To this day he delights in telling about the incident. He describes her thoughtful brown eyes, her wealth of dark curls, and her rosy cheeks. If he has a patient listener he describes the checked blue and green dress, the shoes with copper toe-caps, and the little plaid shawl that she wore. And he never tires of repeating the story the child told when questioned as to her name and where she came from. He says that she answered with a note of pride in her voice:

"'My name is Elsie, and I come from Four Corners. I lived with Mamma Redmon till she took sick and died.'

"'With whom did you live after that?' asked Mr. Tilton. The child looked around as if fearful lest some one might be listening, then she said in a tone of resentment:

"'With an awful naughty woman that used to beat me an' call me names w'at I wouldn't like to tell. She said I grow'd like Topsy, 'thout no papa an' mamma. I don't know who Topsy is,'

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she added, 'but I guess it's an old witch-woman w'at comes out of the woods an' eats up little childern.'

"When undressing the child," said the story-teller, "Mrs. Tilton found a marriage certificate in an old handkerchief which was pinned to her clothing, the contracting parties being Jean Brodeur and Alice Norton. Seeing that John Norton's name and address were on the back of the document, the Tiltons brought the child over here the following day.

"The men who stood by while Mr. Norton read the contents of the time-worn paper wondered why he was so deeply affected. When he took the little stranger by the hand and led her to the house, Mr. Tilton told them about finding her at the station and about the marriage contract. They all understood; they remembered Alice Norton and well knew the sorrow that her mysterious disappearance caused her parents. There was not one in the company who did not sympathize with his neighbor. Even brusque old Jimmie Mills was seen to wipe his eyes frequently as he sauntered down the road toward the starch factory.

"There was a great to-do when it became known that a daughter of Alice Norton had been brought home to her grandparents. Poor child, she was shunned by some of the children. That 'the first shall be last and the last first' has again come true. Now there isn't one in the village who doesn't love and respect her.

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"Many a rainy day Elsie whiled away for her grandfather in reading to him. In turn he used to tell her about his childhood spent in England. The stone cottage covered with ivy and enclosed by an evergreen hedge lost none of its beauty in his description. And the old sailing vessel which brought his family to America was not forgotten. Elsie never tired of hearing about his mother gathering her six children around her morning, noon and night, and giving them their meals from a small tin trunk that contained the food. He usually concluded by saying that his mother's seed-cakes and plum duff were better than any that he had ever eaten since.

"Elsie was between twelve and thirteen years old," said the story-teller, "when her grandmother was taken away. Rather than have a stranger come into the home to manage affairs, Mr. Norton decided that he and the little girl could get along very well by themselves. That was sufficient for the busybodies." In an undertone, as if some neighbor might hear her, she said: "With all due respect for the villagers, I must confess that every community has more or less of such people. I won't mention any names, but one of the neighbors said to me:

"'Land sakes! Ain't it a pity to have Mr. Norton living there alone when there's the Widder Brackett on Ripton Hill hain't got a soul to cut a stick of wood or to draw a pail of water for her!

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He goes mopin' round and tellin' that there never was such another woman as his wife.' "

"What strange people you have here," Rachel commented.

"If you think that odd," said her friend, "I don't know what you will think of what our old minister said to Mr. Norton regarding a second marriage. The old gentleman called at the blacksmith shop one day, ostensibly to get his horse shod. After exhausting the subject of the drought and the rainstorm that followed, and giving his opinion as to their effect upon the crops, he said, in his usual nasal tone:

"'Well, Brother Norton, has it ever occurred to you that it is your duty to take unto yourself another helpmate?' The man assured him that he had given the matter no consideration. Nothing daunted, the elder went on, saying: 'You know the Scripter tells us to look after the widders and fatherless, and I'm inclined to think it means more 'specially the widders. Now there's Mis' Bliffin over to Northfield Corner; a better woman never trod shoe-leather. She's got a big family to fetch up and nobody to help her. Bliffin was a good man enough as fur's the world goes, but he never see the inside of a meetin'-house in his life. And as to his children, why, man alive! They never even heard about Jonah swallerin' the whale nor about Eve makin' Adam out of a rib and a thousand and one other things that's necessary to know in order to be saved.'

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"In reply Mr. Norton said: 'Well, Parson, I think of no one more capable of training the young Bliffins than you are.'

"That silenced the elder for the time being. Finally he said:

"'I've thought of that myself before now, and as you don't 'pear to be interested, I guess I'll ride over some day and see about where I stand in the widder's affections.'"

That was too much for Rachel, and she laughed outright. After her merriment subsided the story-teller continued, saying:

"It was soon after that conversation that Elsie's life was completely changed, and through circumstances which could have been guided only by the hand of Providence."

"Oh! How interesting! In what way did it come about?" Rachel queried.

"While on her way to school one morning," said grandma, "Elsie found a purse containing several gold pieces. When returning home with her treasure-trove many plans of how she would spend it flitted through her mind. Her dream of happiness was shattered, however, when told by her grandfather that he would place a notice in the postoffice, so that the owner might claim his property.

"The days came and went and weeks crept into months; still no one called for the purse. Finally, one morning, the first of September, a gentle tap came at the front entrance of the Norton

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home. That door was seldom opened, and the rusty hinges actually groaned when it swung back upon them. Whom should Mr. Norton find standing there but a distinguished looking middle-aged woman.

"'Whatever brought such a personage here at this early hour?' the man thought. He had not long to wonder, for the visitor soon made known her errand. She said that while on her way to the mountains in June she lost her purse and, thinking that an attempt to find it would be like hunting for a needle in a haymow, she did nothing about it. The woman continued, saying:

"'The money which the silken trinket contained was of little value compared with that of the article itself. It once belonged to my mother, and from association I prized it highly.'

"The description of the purse was so accurate," said the story-teller, "that Mr. Norton immediately gave it to the woman. She was profuse in her thanks and offered to repay him for his trouble. He declined to accept remuneration for what he termed merely doing his duty.

"The caller seemed in no haste. While she lingered and chatted school-time came and Elsie, much to her regret, was obliged to be on her way. After the child was well out of hearing the stranger made several inquiries regarding her. The man thought nothing of that, but in a few days he received a letter from the stranger expressing a wish to adopt Elsie. The letter was signed,

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'Mrs. Rudolph Champlain, Janesville, New York.'

"The old gentleman read the missive twice before he fully comprehended its import. Then he exclaimed:

"'What! A Norton give away his own flesh and blood? Never!' But in spite of that declaration, when for the third time he read the letter, he mused, saying: 'I don't know but she is right. It has come to me a good many times lately that the girl needs the training which only a woman can give.'

"When Elsie returned from school her grandfather took her upon his knee, and together they perused the neatly written pages. At first she, like any youngster, was delighted with the prospect of going to live with the 'story-book lady,' as she called Mrs. Champlain. Then, at the thought of being separated from all that was dear to her, she told her grandfather that she would never leave him. The days that passed between the receipt of the letter and Elsie's going away were sad ones for the lonely old man."

"What! Did he really let her go?"

"Yes," said the narrator, "and Mr. Norton told me himself that parting with the child was like losing another Alice.

"'But,' said he, 'I couldn't deprive the girl of her rights. You know, Mrs. Bradley, as well as I do that she has good blood in her veins.'

"I couldn't dispute him. With each year, the strength of character of Elsie's English mother

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and the refinement inherited from her French father became more and more apparent.

"After considering the matter from every point of view, and consulting two or three old friends of the family, Mr. Norton wrote Mrs. Champlain, telling her that he had decided to place his granddaughter in her care. Their neighbors told me," said the story-teller, "that it was interesting to see the womanliness with which Elsie prepared her scanty wardrobe for going away. But it touched their hearts with pity when they saw her bidding good-bye to her hens and chickens that she had carefully tended, and to the black and white kitten that was all her own.

"The day that Elsie and her grandfather left Old Riverby was clear and crisp, and in spite of the fact that they were so soon to be separated, they enjoyed the ever changing scenery. Mrs. Champlain met them at the station. I suppose," said grandma, "that one can scarcely imagine the girl's joy in that first ride in a beautiful carriage drawn by prancing horses, or her surprise when she entered that magnificent home."

"Why, this is a fairy tale in real life!" Rachel ejaculated.

"To be sure it is," declared the narrator. "The first time Elsie returned to the village she told me that the furniture in her chamber was mahogany and that the high-posted bed had figured blue satin draperies caught back from the corners. Then in her childish glee she added:

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"'And do you know, I have the bureau all to myself!' Then she said: 'What a silly coot I am telling all about my room and not so much as asking if your old tabby-cat has found any new kittens since I went away. But really, Mrs. Bradley,' she went on, 'you can't imagine how strange I felt while unpacking my inexpensive clothes amid all those lovely furnishings. I just trembled lest it should prove to be a dream. But now, for all that Mr. and Mrs. Champlain are so kind to me, some nights I cry myself to sleep thinking about Old Riverby and wishing I were back here.'

"The Champlains were fine people," said Rachel's informant. "Their foster daughter had the same advantages that would have been given their own child had she been spared to them. Yes, Elsie went to one of the finest boarding schools in the country, and before we realized how time was flying, she was ready to graduate. But her pleasures, like those of other mortals, were not unalloyed with pain. One day soon after graduation she overheard a girl say:

"'I don't envy Elsie Champlain if she did get the highest per cent in music of any one in the class! She is only an adopted child, and, furthermore, there is a question as to whether or not her parents were ever married.'"

The story-teller sat musing for awhile then she said:

"I have never fully made up my mind whether it was from fondness for the young man that Mr.

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Champlain invited Doctor Kendal to pass the Christmas holidays with him, or if he thought to make a match for his ward. Be that as it may, it was a case of love at first sight. It was an open secret that after the doctor's return to New York there was a regular correspondence between him and the girl. For sometime Elsie read his letters to her foster parents. Finally a missive came which she carefully concealed. One stormy night, however, when they sat by the fire that burned low on the hearth, she told her benefactors that the last letter from her friend contained a proposal of marriage. When congratulated upon her good fortune in having gained the affections of such an estimable man, she burst into tears. After regaining sufficient composure, Elsie told Mr. and Mrs. Champlain what she had overheard her classmate say. Furthermore, she declared that she would never betroth herself to any man till the mystery spoken of had been solved. Acting upon the decision, she wrote to the young man declining his offer, and telling him her reasons for doing so.

"That made no difference to one of Doctor Kendal's strength of character. He replied at once, saying that he would bide her time. Then came a beautiful diamond ring, which Elsie kept carefully concealed till her engagement was announced. She has told me since her marriage that no one could fancy how she longed to flaunt the costly token in the face of the girl who caused her humiliation.

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"As in a fairy tale," the narrator went on, "everything came out all right. After her grandfather's death, while looking over articles which for many years had been accumulating in the attic, Elsie came across an old leather-covered trunk which contained many time-worn account books and old bills belonging to him. Upon the top of them lay a bundle of letters tied together with faded pink worsted. When she lifted it the moth-eaten threads broke, and away went the long forgotten missives scattered over the floor. The first envelope to be picked up was larger than the others,— and what think you? When Elsie opened it she found her mother's marriage certificate."

"Oh, you don't mean it!" Rachel exclaimed in breathless excitement.

"Indeed I do, and once in possession of the document, the girl lost no time in returning home. It goes without saying that Mr. Champlain and his ward were soon on their way to Quebec. What they learned from a hotel clerk convinced them that Mr. Brodeur, a retired fur-dealer, living in a beautiful chateau situated some distance from the city, was Elsie's grandfather. They called upon him, and were told that his business affairs were in the hands of an agent who could be found at 403 Rue de Frontenac. Nothing daunted, Mr. Champlain insisted upon seeing the gentleman personally. After much parley the aristocrat led the way to an adjoining room."

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"Why, it seems as if I can see the gouty old crosspatch limping along," Rachel commented.

"Be that as it may," said her friend, "when told that the young woman was the daughter of his son, Jean Brodeur, the old fellow flew into a rage and declared his visitors to be impostors. However, after venting his wrath, he mused, saying:

"'Yes, I had a son who brought disgrace upon the family by marrying a woman beneath him socially. I never saw her, nor did I care to. It was enough for me that through her I lost my only son.'

"Mr. Champlain waited till the man regained a certain degree of composure, then he told him about the little girl that was sent from Four Corners to Barton by some unknown person. He then took the marriage contract from his pocket, and said:

"'Sir, whether or not you wish to acknowledge any relationship to my ward, this is undeniable proof that she is your granddaughter.' Before the old gentleman had time to reply, Mr. Champlain continued, saying: 'Allow me to say that we are not here upon a mercenary errand. Since evil-minded people have seen fit to question the legitimacy of her birth, and as she is virtually engaged to be married to a most estimable young man, I have taken this means to ferret out the truth of the matter.'

"I was told," said Rachel's friend, "that Mr.

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Brodeur turned deathly pale when confronted with the facts. He soliloquized, saying:

"'Why, it comes to me, now. Mrs. Redmon, who lived at Four Corners, was employed by us for years. I remember that soon after my son's death she went to Montreal and brought an infant home with her. The child might have been six or seven years old when the woman was thrown from a carriage and seriously injured. A day or two before her death a messenger came and said that Mrs. Redmon had a secret which she must confide to me. I paid no attention to it, and the first I knew the faithful soul passed away.' Then, grasping his guest by the arm, the old man cried: 'My God! This must have been the secret!'

"Elsie told me," said the narrator, "that the unhappy man cried like a child, and was profuse in his thanks to Mr. Champlain for having cared for her. He also offered to remunerate him handsomely for all trouble to which he had been on her account. He then made inquiries regarding the prospective bridegroom. When told his name and that he was a physician, his face lighted up, and he said:

"'Kendal, Kendal, that is the name of my daughter's husband. He has a nephew who is a physician. From your description he must be the same person!'

"If you believe me," said grandma, "the hitherto erratic old gentleman begged Elsie to come and live with him! Under the circumstances she

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was unable to accept his hospitality. Without the least bitterness, however, she assured him that he would be a welcome guest in her home whenever it pleased him to visit her.

" The bridegroom proved to be the same Doctor Kendal whom Mr. Brodeur had mentioned. With her grandfather, her uncle and aunt, together with their sons and daughters, Elsie's family was well represented at her wedding. And thus it is," concluded the story-teller, " that the wheel of fortune turns."

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CHAPTER XIII

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Nearly every town used to boast of its haunted house. Old Riverby was no exception to the rule. There certainly was something uncanny about the tumble-down chimneys and decaying walls of the old Bensil house. It was situated in an open field some distance from the road. No woman or child dared go that way alone in the evening, and it was a foregone conclusion that some men in the village would rather climb Ripton Hill than to pass there after dark.

The members of the inn-keeper's family were not given to superstition, and it never occurred to them to caution Rachel Winn about visiting the old place. One day, when the girl was a bit homesick and preferred the companionship of "Jane Eyre" to that of the guests, she wandered along the river road and, coming to the old estate, made bold to enter, even though there was a sign which prohibited trespassing. Venturing through the half-open gate that hung upon one hinge, she found herself on a broad walk paved with cobblestones. She kept on to the piazza where, with her first footfall upon the lower step, the board gave way, and she came near falling headlong. Nothing

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daunted, she tried another step and still another till she finally reached the landing. Upon seeing the stranger two bluebirds nesting among the vines were frightened away. They soon returned, however, each bringing food for the young ones.

Almost within reach stood a moss-covered well-curb with its weather-beaten sweep halting in mid-air. Beyond lay the unkempt flower garden. In spite of the weeds, poppies — scarlet, pink and white — grew abundantly, and hollyhocks, which had sown themselves year after year, swayed in the breeze. Then, too, velvet marigolds peeped out from among blue and white bachelor's buttons. The garden was separated from a field that sloped down to the river by a hedge of old-fashioned blush rosebushes.

Rachel had read only a few pages when she heard a rustling of dry leaves. Turning, she saw a chipmunk sitting on his haunches and looking at her as much as to say:

"What right have you here upon private grounds?" In spite of his airs, he filled his cheeks with peanuts that were thrown to him and darted out of sight.

Rachel resumed her reading and took no note of time till she saw Lyman Tedford going over the hill with his cows. She then gathered up her skirts and hurried down the grass-grown path, which was already wet with dew. It was nearly seven o'clock when she reached the inn. Mr. Bradley looked up from his paper and said:

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"Well, Miss Oddity, where have you been?" Before the girl had time to reply, he added: "We were about to send the town-crier after you!"

While going upstreet with Dorcas Pendleton that evening, Rachel incidentally mentioned that she spent the afternoon at the old Bensil estate. Daddy Bean, a veteran of the Civil War, happened to hear her. He stopped short and, balancing himself upon his wooden leg, said:

"Did you actilly go to that ha'nted house, Miss?" When Rachel assured him that she did, he went on to say: "You better be shy of that place, for they say the ghost of old lady Bensil appears there betimes. No wonder she can't rest in her grave with 'Pete' Bliss, that gran'son of hern, at large! There's them that says he was blamed ugly to the poor old creter 'fore she died. And everybody in town knows that he run off with what money there was in the house 'fore the relations had a chance to hear the will read. He allus was kind of a dare-devil chap, that 'Pete,'" muttered the old soldier.

Rachel ventured to ask if the worthless fellow ever returned to Old Riverby. To that her informant said:

"Guess not! He's bright enough to know there's three counts outstandin' ag'in him here. One for stealin', another for skippin' out of the sarvice and the third for leadin' poor Mary Aldin astray and then leavin' her 'thout no father to her baby."

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The girls waited to hear no more, but passing on, left the old man to his ruminations. Then began Dorcas Pendleton's story of the strange happenings at the haunted house.

"Why," said she, "I have heard my mother say that a man from Barton who bought the place had scarcely moved in when his cows began to give bloody milk, and every member of the family, even to the hired man, was taken with a violent illness like that of poisoning!"

"In that case, what did the new owner do?" Rachel queried.

"He sold the place back to the heirs for less than half what he gave for it, and returned to Barton."

"And has it been tenantless ever since?"

"With the exception of about two months, when it was occupied by a French-Canadian who left on account of hearing strange noises which came from the attic. But it has recently been sold to a gentleman from Chicago who purposes to have it for a summer home." Then Dorcas went on, saying: "My father declares he is a crank on the germ theory, and says that every tree and shrub is to be cut down. Even the old well-curb is to be destroyed to give place to a sun-parlor!"

"What a pity," Rachel exclaimed, "that the beauty which age alone gives a place should be marred by one who has no appreciation of anything but dollars and cents!" She soon revealed the fact that the remark was not original by say-

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ing that that was what her father said when a real estate agent denuded the hillside near their home of its trees and erected an unsightly tenement block. "If the old Bensil place were mine," Rachel continued, "only necessary repairs should be made, and the well-curb and its long-armed sweep should remain as an ornament."

Dorcas quite agreed with her. She, too, liked the charm of the old house as it was.

The Bradley household was awakened at a late hour that night by some one knocking at the side door. The landlord, thinking that it might be one of the thread-makers on a spree, turned over and went to sleep again. The pounding continued, however, till he arose and, looking out of the window, asked what was wanted. In reply a trembling voice cried:

"For God's sake, let me in!"

The inn-keeper delayed no longer, but slipped on some of his clothing, and hurried down to the door. Who should be there but Peter Bliss, the scapegrace of whom Daddy Bean had given such an unpleasant account! The man, both coatless and hatless, stood aghast. It was only by his unmistakable red-brown hair and the purple scar beneath his left eye that Mr. Bradley recognized him.

Rachel Winn's chamber was immediately over the office. By means of an aperture in the floor through which the stovepipe came she heard the following conversation.

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"Explain yourself!" demanded the landlord. "Why have you of all persons turned up at this hour of the night?"

"God, man!" said the wayfarer, "I don't wonder you ask. Give me time, and I'll tell you!"

The two men stepped inside, and Mr. Bradley said: "Go on with your story, I am listening."

It was then that the criminal confessed to having ill-treated his aged grandmother. He also confessed to having stolen her money while she lay on her deathbed. To that cowardly act the crime of desertion was added. Then he went on to say that when he read about the sale of the old place he couldn't resist the temptation to return to it once more before it passed into the hands of strangers.

"At dusk," the outcast continued, "I took a boat from Norwood Landing and came down the river. I concealed the skiff under a pile of brushwood and climbed the steep slope, thinking to be off again before daybreak. I carefully crept over the knoll at the rear of the barn, and put my ear to the ground now and again to find if any teams were passing. All being quiet, I proceeded toward the house. I had gone but a few steps when an owl hooted. My hair fairly stood on end; it seemed as if the devil himself was after me!"

"Never mind about your bosom friend," said Mr. Bradley. "Go on with your story."

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The man resumed the telling of his weird experience by saying:

"The house seemed strange till I reached the room which I occupied when a boy. There was no furniture left except an old couch; upon that I threw myself and fell asleep. When I woke the sun was streaming through the shutters. I well knew that to think of leaving town during the day was out of the question, so I spent the morning in reading old letters that for years have been hidden away in a secret closet. Toward night I was startled by hearing footsteps. Fearing that the officers had apprehended me, my heart actually stood still. I crept down over the stairs and peered out beside the window shade, to find that a young girl sat on the piazza reading. I was about to take her into my confidence and ask her to bring me something to eat, when she closed her book and started down the walk.

"When night came, thinking to watch the lightning and perhaps to hear the rain patter on the roof, I again threw myself onto the couch. Again I fell asleep and dreamed that I was on the very brink of the infernal regions. There, stirred by laughing demons, was the brimstone from which came suffocating fumes. I turned and saw my mother with arms outstretched to save me from the fiery pit. Upon the wall, in words of flame, was written every evil deed of my life."

"It must have been a broad space that held them," said Mr. Bradley contemptuously.

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"Right you are," conceded the culprit. "And the betrayal of poor Mary stood out brighter than all the rest. And what do you think? When I woke there were groans coming from the attic. That was too much for me, and instead of trying to find my way downstairs, I leaped from the chamber window and ran till I reached your door." Then, in a subdued voice, the penitent said: "As a servant of the law, John Bradley, do with me what you will."

"The question is, what can I do in a case like yours?"

"Help a poor devil to become a man!" Then the outcast went on to say: "Those who are well-born can scarcely understand what odds a man has to contend with who has bad blood in his veins. It is like a drop of poison; it contaminates one's whole being unless by some means it can be eradicated!" With increasing fervor he continued, saying: "You know that my mother was one of the best women in the world. You also know what she suffered from the villain that she unwisely chose for a husband."

"Yes," said Mr. Bradley, "but what of that?"

"Simply that the good inherited from her cries out for the regeneration of the evil tendencies bequeathed me by my lawless father. If any man can help me you are the one."

"What can I do, since there is theft, desertion and bastardy laid at your door?"

"In the first case," said the culprit, "I can

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repay, and with interest, the sum taken from the family estate. As to desertion, the war has been over too long for that to cause my arrest."

"But what of the girl who died, leaving a fatherless child?"

In reply to that the man said:

"You won't be too hard on me when I tell you that I have supported the boy ever since he was born."

Mr. Bradley was astonished at that revelation. Without further comment, he showed Peter Bliss to a room and told him to remain there till morning, when he would see what could be done for him.

It was the next day, or perhaps it was the one after that, when Mr. Philbrick and Mr. Folsom, the village carpenters, went out to the old Bensil estate to begin alterations. It required considerable courage on the part of both to enter the haunted house. Mr. Folsom took his rifle along and laughingly remarked that he would shoot every ghost and goblin that appeared. All went well the first day and the second, but upon the third a storm set in, and a moaning sound was heard which seemed to come from the upper part of the house. As the wind increased in force it became louder and louder. Finally the carpenters, in a frenzy of fear, dropped their tools and started for home.

Within an hour's time everyone in the village knew of their supposed narrow escape from what

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they believed to be some horrible creature inhabiting the unused loft. In the meantime, Peter's strange experience was bruited abroad. That, together with settling the charges preferred, kept him busy answering questions. In spite of the crimes to which Rachel Winn heard him confess, she pitied the poor fellow, and was glad to know that by remunerating the Bensil heirs for what he had taken from them he was set free.

A week later two college students, stopping at one of the mountain hotels, came down to the village and begged the privilege of spending a few days at the old rookery, as they called the haunted house. They had evidently heard of the ghost stories, and doubtless thought to add something startling to their already long list of adventures.

Deacon Frost was a good Methodist, still he had a leaning toward spiritualism. He said, with an air of disgust:

"Jest as if them city chaps know more'n all Old Riverby folks! Hain't there been apparitions seen in other places in town? Didn't Mis' Dobbins' mother 'pear to her the night 'fore her baby died?"

There were others who also believed the strange happenings at the unoccupied house were due to supernatural causes.

As the new owner was in Europe, the students were given permission to remain there as long as they wished. Each one fitted himself out with a revolver and sufficient ammunition to destroy

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an army. They were at the old domicile more than a week without hearing or seeing anything unusual. They began to think that the whole story was a hoax. They said one to the other:

"Probably that old drapery at the window was what Bliss took to be the ghost of his mother. And as for the noise, that might have been in his own head. I take it that he is no stranger to champagne."

While discussing the matter, the wind gave a low whistle through the vines that grew in profusion over the veranda. That was immediately answered by a wail from the attic. One of the young men turned to the other and said:

"Pshaw! Is that what all the talk is about?"

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the noise became like the shrieks of a maniac. They both sprang to their feet, and with revolvers in hand, hurried toward the garret door. Upon trying to open it they found the bolt rusted into the socket. With a knock from the butt of one of the pistols it receded, and the door flew open. The rafters of the unfinished apartment were so completely interwoven with cobwebs that it seemed impossible for anything to live there. Still, with considerable bravado, the ghost hunters proceeded up the narrow, rickety stairway. Upon reaching the top, they saw a large aperture in the wall adjoining the barn.

"The mystery is solved," said one of the marauders." But it remains to be seen what kind

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of game we have to deal with." The other one pointed to a dark object, and whispered:

"There's the chap."

"Where?" queried his companion. Then he, too, saw something away under the eaves that, in the dim light, resembled a huge brown bear. The more courageous of the two advanced toward the strange object. He was about to fire when he thought he saw it move. Thereupon he retraced his steps, and gave his friend an opportunity to exhibit his skill as a huntsman. Despite the valor of both, they decided that to fire and miss the mark would prove disastrous. Acting upon that decision, they backed gingerly down the stairs and closed the door. Upon reaching the village, wild with excitement, they found plenty of men and boys ready to assist in the capture of the noisome creature.

Deacon Frost was somewhat chagrined at having his belief in spirits disproved; still he took a club and joined the group that was bent on destroying the strange beast.

Mr. Bradley declared that he didn't take any stock in the cock-and-bull story told by the students; still he, too, went with the others on their murderous errand. Upon his return he said that the strange object proved to be nothing but an old buffalo coat with which a hole in the roof had been calked. When questioned by the guests regarding the noises heard, he said that they were produced by a toy whistle which the mischievous

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"Pete" remembered to have placed beneath the coping when he was a youngster in order to frighten the housemaids. And thus were explained the mysterious happenings at the haunted house.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE PERCIVALS

Lord and Lady Percival, as the villagers called an elderly couple of that name, lived in a picturesque white cottage just beyond the church. They were interesting people. Both Mr. and Mrs. Percival had an air of refinement which bespoke good breeding. Strange as it may seem, they lived in the village a long time before their neighbors were able to make out just who they were or where they came from. It is needless to say that great excitement prevailed when, through a guest of the family, it became known that there had been a broken engagement between the couple and that, in spite of inexorable fate which had separated them for years, they had finally married. The secret once out, the old gentleman and lady didn't hesitate to tell about their early attachment, their long separation, and their happy reunion.

Dorcas Pendleton was a great favorite with both Mr. Percival and his charming wife, therefore, Rachel Winn was privileged to hear their romantic story at first hand. One evening when the girls sat on the rose-covered veranda with the

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elderly people, the queenly hostess started up as from a reverie, and said:

"How little one half of the world knows how the other half lives!"

"What put that trite saying into your head?" her husband asked.

"Why, I was just thinking how little the aristocrats living on Beacon Hill sixty years ago knew or cared about Jesse Brown's wife and children." Then, as if her husband had never heard the tale before, or perhaps it was for the benefit of the girls, she continued, saying: "To be sure, our family was thought much of while we lived in a fine house, and my father came sailing into Boston harbor now and again with a well-filled purse! But when he went away and didn't return for two years and more, and my mother was obliged to rent three small rooms to live in, her friends disappeared like dew before the sun, so to speak. Some of them even passed us by without a look of recognition. We children didn't mind so much, but poor mother felt it keenly."

"Oh, then you were born in Boston," Rachel ventured to say.

"Certainly," said the woman with an air of pride. "My early childhood days were spent playing beneath the famous old elm on the Common. Except for circumstances of which I shall tell you later, Boston would have been my home to this day."

The story-teller then gave an account of being

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separated from her mother and her little brothers and sisters when she was but twelve years of age, and of going to Vermont to live with a distant relative of her father. A tear stole down the woman's cheek as she said that each one of the children insisted upon giving her some toy to take away with her, and that her mother wept piteously while packing up the simple wardrobe.

"Well I remember looking out of the coach window and bidding them all good-bye," said the story-teller. She continued, saying: "How vividly I recall the dense forests through which we passed before reaching the old tavern, where Mr. Bertram met me, and his wife whom I was to call aunt. Riding over hill and dale brought joy to my childish heart, and I nearly forgot my grief at leaving home. But the 'creeps' go down my spine even now when I think of the forbidding expression upon Aunt Malinda's face. I felt instinctively that Uncle Silas would be a friend to me. When he lifted me down from the carriage I suggested going to the barn to assist in unharnessing the horses. One look from aunt settled the matter. She said: 'I am amazed that a girl of your age should be so bold.' But there," said the narrator, "my early experience in Prattville would better be passed over."

"And did you never return to Boston?" Dorcas asked.

"No, dear," said the woman, "and the worst of it was when I was something like fifteen years

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old I overheard Aunt Malinda tell Uncle Silas that upon my father's return from sea two weeks after I left home a letter came from him requesting her to bring me to Boston. She also confessed to having destroyed the missive lest it fall into my hands and make me more homesick than I already was."

"That certainly was a dastardly act, mother," said Mr. Percival, "but if you had returned to the 'Hub' who would be looking out for me these days?"

"True enough, Dyer," the fond wife responded. "It is an ill wind that blows good to no one." Then the woman's mind reverted to the time when she and her husband first met, and she said: "Don't you remember the old church in Prattville where we used to listen to sermons an hour long?"

Mr. Percival made no reply, but remarked:

"I was thinking of Bob Wilmot who put his head in at the door when several clergymen were dining at his father's house and exclaimed: 'There goes the last dandelion!' I think the venturesome youth finally became a minister. If so, doubtless he has robbed many a youngster of the remaining bit of some toothsome delicacy."

"Be that as it may," rejoined Mrs. Percival, "I saw so much of parsons whom aunt entertained that I enjoyed the going to and coming from church far more than I did their preaching. Especially when you walked home with me. And how perfectly furious aunt was whenever you

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lingered at the gate for a last word! It was when she found that you had made a proposal of marriage that her ungovernable temper reached the danger point."

From the narrative it was evident that Mrs. Bertram was jealous of any attention shown her ward, especially that coming from young men. However, it seems that Mary Brown outwitted the meddlesome woman, and finally became engaged. That true love never runs smoothly was again verified. The girl's betrothed was immediately called to England on important business, and by unforeseen events was detained beyond all expectation. When month after month passed without any word from him, either to his fiancée or to his parents, Mrs. Bertram became more unkind to the girl than usual. She taunted her with saying that doubtless young Percival went away to rid himself of such a ne'er-do-well." The story-teller's eyes flashed with indignation while relating some of the trying incidents which occurred during the years of waiting for her absent lover.

"Finally," said she, "exasperated beyond endurance, and believing Dyer to have been lost at sea, I declared that I would marry the first man that proposed to me."

According to the heroine's own story, fate seemed to take a hand in the matter. About that time Leonard Douglas, a young man from Canada, came to Prattville and fell desperately in love with her.

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"Girl-like I married him," said the story-teller. Then in explanation she said: "Mr. Douglas was a fine young man, good enough for any girl. But when a woman gives her hand in marriage her heart should go with it. I didn't deceive him. I told him about my engagement to Mr. Percival, and tried to assure him that he would always be first in my affections. In spite of that, with the conceit of his kind, he thought when once I was his I should forget the old lover. But this isn't telling the girls about my going to Canada to live, where I found people so different from those in the States."

"Why," said Dorcas, "my mother came from Quebec, and we think she is the dearest woman in the world."

"'When place we seek, or place we shun, the soul finds happiness in none,'" said Mrs. Percival. "Mr. Douglas was a kind, indulgent husband, and in the first years of our married life we had a beautiful home. Leonard was delighted when John Nelson, our first child, was born. He said: "'Don't you think you love me just a wee bit more, Mary, since I am the father of the youngster?'

"I was ready to burst into tears with thinking how different it might have been, so I made no reply lest I should betray my feelings. However, the infant's prattle brought a deeper sense of regard for its father than I had ever felt before. And when two years later little Margaret

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came I truthfully told Leonard that I was more fond of him than I was on our wedding day."

Dorcas and Rachel looked up to see how Mr. Percival would take that. Instead of being in the least offended, he said:

"Small return, mother, for a good man's devotion."

Taking no notice of her husband's remark, the woman went on with telling about Mr. Douglas's failure in business, and about moving to York State. Then followed an account of the man becoming discouraged and of his spending money at the alehouse which should have been spent for food and clothing for their children.

"It was during those wretched days," said the story-teller, "that I heard from my mother for the first time in many years. She had written to several families bearing the name of Douglas, all to no purpose. By some good fortune, however, that letter chanced to reach me. She said that my father's long absence from home at the time I came away was occasioned by the villainy of one of his crew who, through base falsehoods, caused him to be incarcerated in a Spanish prison. She also said that his voyage since then had been successful, and that he had finally given up following the sea. The letter stated that he had just disposed of his vessel and received a large sum of money. She closed by saying:

"'You will readily understand that, in spite of our good fortune, we cannot be happy till every

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means has been taken to find our dear, absent daughter, that she may share with the other children what rightfully belongs to her.'

"I read the daintily written lines over and over again," continued Mrs. Percival, "before I could be sure that some strange hallucination was not passing through my tired brain. When I realized the truth of the message which they brought, my heart fairly leaped for joy. My childhood home came vividly to mind. There was my mother with the gentle blue eyes and flaxen hair. There were the children ready for bed, kneeling beside her in their evening devotions. Then, too, I fancied that I could hear Granny Vroom, the old Dutch fruit-vender across the way, calling out in her broken English: 'Cherries all ripe! Cherries all ripe!'

"My first thought was that I would immediately send for money to defray the expenses of my family to Boston. But when I saw John Nelson with his only pair of trousers out at the knees, and Margaret, poor child, wearing a faded calico, and thought of their besotted father who might come staggering in from the tavern at any moment, my heart sank within me. May God forgive my inordinate pride," said the woman, "but lest some one of my family should seek me out and find me in such straitened circumstances, I never replied to my mother's loving missive."

"Oh, how cruel," Rachel thought, and perhaps

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she said so under her breath. In any case, the woman continued, saying:

"Strangely enough, through an accident which happened to Mr. Douglas two weeks later I was left a widow."

Rachel afterwards confessed to Dorcas that she was somewhat relieved by that declaration. She said that she had been wondering how the woman ever rid herself of her undesirable companion.

"Let me tell you," said Mrs. Percival, "in spite of what the Good Book says about caring for widows and the fatherless you would be amazed to know the petty meanness of women and the cruelty of men. When I think of Doctor Fisher who turned me and my children out of house and home two days after the burial of my husband, and of the wife who declined to furnish me with any more sewing because I was no longer a tenant of theirs, I wonder if they may not still be wandering about purgatory seeking peace for their sordid souls."

"'Beneath the clouds the starlight lurks; through showers the sunbeams fall,'" quoted Mr. Percival. "A year later when the widow Douglas was in the depths of despair, who should appear on the scene but a lone bachelor with a heart full of love and a purse full of gold for her."

"So you did, Dyer, God bless you! And the world can never know how kind you were to my children!"

"Never mind about that," said the man, "since

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they became men and women of whom we both may be justly proud."

"The story will not be complete," said Mrs. Percival, "till you tell the girls about your perilous sea-voyage which changed our first plans for marriage."

Curfew was already ringing, but Dorcas assured her friends that she and Rachel were in no haste. Thereupon Mr. Percival began his tale of adventure.

"Upon leaving New York the weather was all that could be desired. We had been out but a few hours when a dead calm settled down upon us. That was followed by a terrible storm. Our vessel was tossed about like a feather by waves mountain high. Within a short time the passengers and many of the crew were ill. The captain lost his bearings, and it soon became evident that the staunch ship was going to pieces. I strapped myself to a beam and soon lost consciousness. When I came to I was lying upon the shore of a tropical island. Above me, and looking inquiringly into my face, stood a young girl. She belonged to the uncivilized race inhabiting that bit of paradise which had been dropped down in mid-ocean. She brought me a gourd of water and a basket of freshly gathered fruit. On regaining sufficient strength, I crawled to the shelter of a palm tree. Many of the natives gathered around me and performed strange incantations. My first thought was that they were about to take my life, but from

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certain gestures I concluded that they thought me to be a god sent to bless them. Those people," said the narrator, "neither Spanish nor Malay, had the blood of both nations. Their bronze-like bodies were partially concealed by long straight black hair that fell loosely about their shoulders. They lived in caves and subsisted on fish, wild fowl, roots and herbs.

"Month after month I wandered up and down the shining strand, hoping against hope to sight a sail. The monotony was broken only by occasional visits from my benefactor, the young girl who at first befriended me. She brought me garlands of flowers and danced in graceful, rhythmic movements. Then again she would sing in weird strains that resembled the moaning of the sea. That her childish, simple heart was touched with affection for me could not be doubted. By means of gestures and a few words of the girl's strange language, which I learned to understand, she begged me to bring her away with me. However much I would have liked to see the effect of civilization upon her untutored mind, I had not the heart to separate the child from her people and her natural environment.

"To return to myself," said the story-teller, "one can scarcely realize my joy when upon waking one morning I heard voices unlike those of the islanders. To my surprise I saw several men near at hand. 'This is my chance,' I thought. Sheltered by the luxuriant tropical vines, I ven-

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tured near enough to learn that they were pirates whose vessel was anchored near the shore. I had nothing to fear from them, since my only earthly possession consisted of a one piece garment made of bark. Parley on my part was needless, for the desperadoes saw the situation at a glance. Whether those murderous corsairs saved me for humanity's sake, or if it were for selfish motives, will never be known. In any case, they took me along when they set sail and locked me into a small cabin beneath the ship's deck."

"Oh, how perfectly dreadful!" Dorcas ventured to say.

"From exhaustion I fell asleep, but was soon awakened by the splashing of oars and the cries of infuriated men. Finally the confusion ceased, and only voices of men conversing in low tones were audible. Then came a sound like that of splitting wood. Nearer and nearer it came till, with a tremendous blow, down crashed the door of my prison-house and I stood face to face with an English sailor.

"After relating my tale of misfortune I was taken on deck, where the villainous outlaws lay weltering in their own blood. It seemed that the English vessel had been in pursuit of the marauders for sometime. After overcoming them and taking possession of their spoils, the crew of the *Mentone* set fire to the viking ship and returned to Liverpool. Upon hearing my name and recalling the fact that my father was once a

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schoolmate of his, Captain Bentley gladly gave me passage, and upon going ashore furnished me with funds to defray my expenses home."

Dorcas and Rachel were profuse in their thanks for the evening's entertainment. They declared it to be more interesting than any "Arabian Nights" tale.

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CHAPTER XV

THE MYSTERIOUS LIKENESS UPON A MIRROR

A foot-path led out from the highroad about halfway between the village and Barton. It continued on through a pine grove and up over a hillside to a small dwelling. The structure, with a suggestion of red paint upon it, had small balconies beneath the windows and a broad piazza, after the fashion of a Swiss chalet. The steps leading to the veranda were crumbling to pieces and the balustrades were fast losing their hold upon the spiral rods. This dilapidated house stood in the midst of a clump of tall white birches which, if approached at nightfall, appeared like so many ghosts.

The villagers declared that the face of a woman upon the mirror in the living-room prevented curious visitors from entering the old ruin. Seeing the apparition they quietly withdrew, and carefully closed the door. They went so far as to say that no one had ventured beyond the threshold of the porch since the owner went away.

As the story goes, an artist, with the eccentricities of his kind, came to Old Riverby years before Rachel Winn made her first visit there, and erected

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the "House in the Woods." That was the name over the door, but it was more frequently spoken of as the "Artist's Retreat."

The name didn't matter, but when the old gentleman went away, and after an absence of two or three weeks returned with a handsome young wife, the town was all agog. Many a gossip, shaking her head and gesticulating with her initial finger, declared that the time would come when she would be running off with a younger man. It was only conjecture on the part of the busybodies — still, the prediction came true. It happened naturally enough. The second summer after the artist settled in the cottage Jaffery Blondin, a wealthy young sport from the South, came to "The Ridgewood." Blondin had done crayon work and had dabbled in oils somewhat. Upon hearing of the famous painter near at hand, he immediately made arrangements to study with him.

"To be sure," he thought, "I can spare two mornings each week. Sister Constance will gladly excuse me from riding with her. And hang it! Ruth Atherton will have to acquiesce in my plans." In speaking of Miss Atherton, his fiancée, to a friend he said: "Great Scot! It makes a difference whether a fellow is engaged to a girl from choice or merely from principle." He told some one else that he didn't propose to give up his club, or to let the paint dry on to his brushes to please any woman.

It was not strange that such an unprincipled

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fellow should become infatuated with the artist's charming wife, nor that he should doubt the felicity of her marriage. With his doubts came the assurance that she was the only woman in the world for him. He began to drop in frequently, ostensibly to ask about the mixing of some color, or to see what his instructor was at work upon. Then, too, he frequently lunched with the couple and spent many an afternoon on their broad veranda, the gentlemen talking of art and its influence toward a higher civilization, while the woman's deft fingers were employed with some bit of needle-work. And it was no unusual sight to see the three strolling through the woods together. With his intense desire to note every touch of beauty in the landscape, the artist wholly forgot the presence of his wife and her attentive escort. It was noticeable to others, however, that in crossing a spongy morass or a swiftly running stream the younger man invariably assisted the woman. Thus, in the very presence of the husband began the love-making. Doubtless the girl married the elderly gentleman, thinking her admiration for his genius to be love. Perhaps she never would have known the difference if the young man hadn't come into her life. Unfortunately, under his seductive influence, her high ideals were soon set at naught. In place of them they made a law unto themselves.

Miss Blondin and Miss Atherton left the mountains the first of September. It was not till the

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morning of their departure that they learned of Jaffery's plan to remain a month longer. The sister gracefully accepted his apology for letting her go home without him. She was rather pleased than otherwise that her erstwhile scapegrace of a brother had finally settled down to something, even if it were nothing more than making a few sketches. It was evident to the remaining guests, however, that Miss Atherton, who went away with eyes red from weeping, saw the matter from a different point of view.

It was the last of October, or to be exact, it was Hallow-e'en night, that the inn-keeper was aroused by a loud knocking. When he opened the door who should be there but the venerable artist, whose face was even whiter than his snowy locks. In his usual courteous manner he inquired if his wife had been there during the evening. The inn-keeper could give him no information concerning her. But the chore-boy who slept in a room adjoining the office called out, saying that he saw her driving toward Norwood with young Blondin. He thought it was about dusk when they went away. The man became even paler than he was when he entered. He stood in speechless amazement; finally he soliloquized, saying:

"The wretch who entered my house in the guise of a gentleman has robbed me of my wife!"

The man made no further comment except to excuse himself for having disturbed the landlord. With lantern in hand he retraced his weary steps

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back to his desolate home. The next morning found the villagers wild with excitement at the occurrence of what they had long foreseen to be inevitable. They were none the wiser for the way in which the injured man bore the shock. Thereafter his doors were closed to all visitors.

The winter came and melted into spring — still there was no sign of life at the "House in the Woods," except for the shaft of blue that daily rose from the birches, and for the glimmer of light that nightly peered out into the gloom.

With the return of summer many of the guests came back to "The Ridgewood." For the first few days after the arrival of each the elopement of Jaffery Blondin and the artist's handsome wife was the one absorbing topic of conversation. They all expressed sympathy for disappointed Miss Atherton, but none of them evinced the least pity for the young woman who had so ruthlessly been robbed, both of her home and of her good name. The summer was still young when one of the "piazza fixtures" saw by the *Washington Star* that Jaffrey Blondin had married an heiress from southern California. The paper stated that it was another case of love at first sight. The couple met on a railway train and were married a month later. One of the guests shrugged her shoulders and said that it was high time Jaffrey left off sowing "wild oats." Another, who had marriageable daughters, regretted that he was no longer in the market.

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It was something more than a year from the time the artist's wife went away that she returned to him. Many of the villagers still remember the night. It was Christmas eve and bitterly cold. When the widow Lebaron, a French woman, who was maid-of-all-work at the cottage, heard a sound at the front door, she listened to make sure whether it was some one knocking, or if the limb of a tree was grazing the side of the house. Upon opening the door there stood her former mistress, pale and emaciated almost beyond recognition. She was thinly clad and her only wrap consisted of an old plaid shawl. Without a word she hurried through the porch past the housekeeper and into the living-room. When the recreant wife saw her haggard features depicted in the mirror which extended from the ceiling to the floor she stood spellbound. Noting the traces of jealousy and despair, she whispered:

"Can it be that I am so changed? Or has my husband foreseen my misery and portrayed its effects?"

"That is my masterpiece," said a voice, coming from the shadow of an alcove.

The words were no more than spoken before the penitent was kneeling beside her distinguished husband. When to every entreaty for pardon he turned a deaf ear, she rose, and, throwing back her shawl, revealed a beautiful babe sweetly sleeping on her breast. Before the astonished man found words for utterance, she thrust the child into

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his arms, and hurriedly disappeared out into the darkness.

The old gentleman passed the little waif to his housekeeper. The following morning he gave it to her as her own, together with means sufficient for their support. When the heartbroken man was well rid of the woman and her helpless charge, he left town as mysteriously as he had come, without so much as turning the key in the door of his house.

During Rachel Winn's stay in Old Riverby she frequently saw the widow Lebaron and her foster daughter, who was then some fifteen years of age. More than one of the villagers, upon seeing them coming, said to Rachel:

"Sh! Don't speak of the girl having been adopted. Mrs. Lebaron would be deeply grieved if the child should learn that she is not her mother."

Some of the villagers believe the likeness of the artist's wife on the old mirror to have been painted by her husband. But to this day there are others who are equally sure that it was done by an unseen hand as a curse upon the woman.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE FORTUNES OF PHILLIP TURNER

Old Riverby still prides itself on having been the birthplace of several illustrious men. It was there that Governor Willford and Chief Justice Spencer first saw the light of day. Then came the Farwell twins, both of whom distinguished themselves as politicians. But nothing delights the natives more than to relate incidents in the life of Phillip Turner, another of their townsmen who became famous. His father descended from an old English family and his mother was a Van Dyke. But the fact that Phillip was born with a caul seemed of more importance than any number of distinguished ancestors. Rachel Winn was wholly ignorant of what that meant, but refrained from making any inquiry of Mrs. Hudson, the miller's wife, who was only too glad to relate the story.

"Yes," said the woman, "it is an actual fact that the child was born with a veil over his face."

"Ah! That is what it means," Rachel thought.

With an air of pride the woman continued, saying:

"As I was the nearest neighbor to the Turners

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and sent for old lady Tillson, the midwife, myself, who should know more about the strange happening than I do? Then, too, Adelaide and Harriet, the half-grown daughters, stayed at my house the night their brother was born." Rachel didn't mind where the girls stayed; she was more desirous of hearing about the little stranger. Finally the story-teller said. "What a to-do there was when Old Riverby people found that such a strange occurrence had taken place. The little fellow wasn't more than twenty-four hours old before the news was heralded throughout the town. Both men and women went to see the child and many of them didn't hesitate to tell the parents their opinion as to whether the veil portended good, or if it foretold the coming of evil.

"Girls married so young in those days," said Mrs. Hudson, "that it seemed no time after the boy came into the Turner family before Adelaide and Harriet settled in homes of their own. Adelaide married a wealthy lumber dealer and went West to live, while Harriet, the eldest of the two, married Neil Horton and settled here in the village. In less than a year she became demented, and her parents were obliged to take her home and care for her. It proved a mild form of insanity however; the girl rarely showed signs of violence. Still, according to the doctor's orders, she was locked into her room at night, and a close watch was kept over her throughout the day. It seemed as if Harriet's undoing was the precursor of un-

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ending trouble to the rest of the family. She had been home only a short time when her father was stricken down with a strange illness. After lingering between life and death for months, he recovered sufficiently to sit up, but he never took another step.

"To go back to Phillip," said the story-teller, "he was then twelve or thirteen years of age. In spite of his youth, he was compelled to leave school and take charge of the farm-work. To be sure, he studied evenings, but that could scarcely make up for what he lost in not attending the daily sessions." To Mrs. Hudson the Turner children seemed like her own, and she said, with considerable feeling: "Think of that boy with a refined, sensitive nature growing up amid such depressing surroundings! There sat the father year after year, as helpless as a babe. Leading from his father's room was the one occupied by his deranged sister. Then, too, Phillip saw his mother wearing herself out with unceasing care of the two unfortunates, one erratic and unreasonable, the other hilarious or morose."

Though the hero of the tale was already a man occupying a high position, the trials of his youth touched Rachel Winn's kind heart, and before she was aware of it, her eyes were dimmed with tears.

"Sunday evenings gave the boy his only respite from care," said the narrator. "He was privileged to attend services at the village church and that gave him an opportunity to walk home with

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Rose Westwood. Rose was something of a coquette. Her mother frequently threatened to send her away to boarding school if she didn't stop flirting. And Phillip was attractive. The girls were as crazy over him as the boys were over his favorite whom he was wont to call the 'Rose of Old Riverby.'"

"And how did it turn out?" Rachel asked.

"Oh, after the fashion of most early love affairs. Perhaps it would have ended differently, however, if the Civil War hadn't broken out at that time. Phillip was only seventeen, but having had great responsibility, he seemed much older. The reading of war news inspired him with patriotism, he enlisted and was soon off for the South."

Rachel again interrupted the story-teller by asking if the young man ever returned.

"Yes," said the woman, "after four years of hard fighting, and after he had ruined his health and lost his right arm."

"Oh! And he so young!" Rachel exclaimed. Then, girl-like, she wanted to know if his sweetheart remained true to him all that time.

"Indeed she did not," said Mrs. Hudson. "He hadn't been gone a month when Will Stopford from Princeton won her heart without the least effort. That escapade was no more than over when she went to Boston and fell in love with a wholesale jeweler. Phillip's mother thought it no more than right that she should let him know

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how things were going. In spite of her letters he, with the conceit of men, thought it was all talk, and that upon his return Rose would have no thought for any one but him.

"Alas for human credulity!" sighed Mrs. Hudson. "When Phillip lost his arm that settled the matter. Rose didn't hesitate to say that she should never marry a man who was disabled for life. Those who sympathized with Phillip little dreamed that the loss of his arm would bring him to intellectual heights which otherwise he never would have attained."

"How did that come about?"

"In kind of a story-book fashion. For a long time after Phillip came home he lay about the house unable to do anything,— another invalid added to the list. His mother was heartbroken at seeing his helplessness. Her face grew thinner and paler as the days went by. But," said the story-teller, "it is a long road that has no turn, and her cares finally began to lessen. First Harriet, whose life had been despaired of for a long time, passed away. Then Phillip received a letter from Adelaide, urging him to come and live with her.

"The making ready of Phillip's wardrobe, the scraping of lint for the dressing of his wounded shoulder, and the packing of delicacies for him to eat on the way consumed more time than his mother had planned on. The result was that November was here before he was ready to start on

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his long and tiresome journey. He little dreamed of the obstacles that lay before him, or of the success with which his efforts to surmount them would be crowned.

"It was on a cold, rainy night that Phillip reached Bristol where his sister anxiously awaited his coming. The two scarcely recognized each other. He whom Adelaide left a mere boy a few years before was seemingly a broken-down man. And she that went away just a slip of a girl had become a matronly woman. The happy greeting over, they were soon off for the beautiful home.

"Phillip had never seen anything that equaled the magnificence of the furnishings of his sister's house. Like a will-o'-the-wisp sleep eluded him. He lay there wondering how it was possible for Adelaide to live in such luxury without taking some measures to lighten the burdens of her mother. He soon learned that her husband, Joseph Smalley, was master of the household, even to the smallest expenditure. The millionaire delighted in possessing the handsomest residence in the city, and in knowing that his wife was the best gowned woman in Bristol society, but the world never suspected that his charming companion was not allowed a penny of her own, even for pin money. It seems that Adelaide accepted the situation complacently and made a pretense of being fond of her churlish husband. Her brother made no comment, but he wondered from whom she inherited such meekness.

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"'Surely not from the Turners,' he thought. 'Nor from our mother, who, though the personification of love and devotion, would never endure such humiliation as that from any man.'

"To go back to Phillip," said the good woman, "he soon became friendly with Mr. Patmore, Mr. Smalley's legal adviser. One day the attorney made bold to ask Phillip if he didn't think a knowledge of law would be useful to him. Having been deprived of an early education, Phillip doubted his ability to master such a course of study. Nothing daunted, the good man continued his appeal to Phillip by saying:

"'A man may lose every limb of his body and still retain perfect mentality.'

"That son of Old Riverby was no sluggard," said Mrs. Hudson. "He acted upon the suggestion of his new found friend and began his task at once, first reviewing lessons which he learned as a boy, then taking up more difficult studies. In a few months he obtained a situation as teacher in a suburban school. And," said the story-teller, "he told me himself that many a night he studied till twelve o'clock and past, lest some question be asked the following day which he could not answer. That state of affairs lasted but a short time, however, for Lawyer Patmore took him into his office and gave him every opportunity to advance in the profession. When, five years later, Phillip came home to attend his father's funeral, he was a full-fledged attorney."

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Rachel broke in upon the narrator and said:

"The Westwood girl must have regretted that she treated him so shabbily."

"If she did, no one was the wiser. During Phillip's absence she married and settled over in Barton."

"Your prince of good fortune couldn't have been impregnable to Cupid's darts all that time," Rachel commented shyly.

"There it is again," said the woman. "It takes the young people to guess such secrets. Every girl and boy in the village declared that Phillip was already engaged when he was here, but we older ones didn't believe it till we received cards for his wedding. The couple now have three half-grown sons who, I am told, are considerably set up since their father has been appointed attorney-general of the state where they live."

To this day Old Riverby people differ in opinion as to whether Phillip Turner's success was due to parental influence or if it came through having been born with a veil over his face.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE LEGEND OF LONE ISLAND

It was a custom with the pupils of Norwood Academy to have their annual picnic at Lone Island. Through the kindness of Lena Sargent, one of the Old Riverby girls who attended the school, Rachel Winn was invited to join in their holiday. The company met at the old tavern. From there they had a ten-mile drive before reaching their destination. The August haze hung about the mountains, and in the fields, tinted with a second crop of red clover, locusts droned their lazy songs. On reaching Mt. Tilson the carriages zigzagged back and forth on a road which resembled a narrow white ribbon. Making the final turn, they came to Lake Duncan, a brooch of diamonds on the misty mountain-top.

An aged boatman living in an old shack near the shore rowed the party to the island. He spoke no word, and Rachel wondered if he were the same mute oarsman who guided Elaine's frail barque down the silent river. Upon landing they found long rustic tables which looked as if they had been there since time out of mind. In any case they were soon spread with snowy linen and luncheon made ready.

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Miriam Wolcott was invited to chaperone the party. Though she was past forty and still unmarried, no one thought of calling her an old maid. She had been disappointed in love when young, but was not morose or selfish on account of it. Her soulful dark eyes and abundant red-brown curls were a joy to see. The pompadour, the waterfall and puffs came into fashion and went out again for other women, but Miriam never changed her mode of hair-dressing. Some people declared it was because James Swanson, her faithless lover, said that the curls were her crowning glory. However, Miriam's chief delight lay in telling love stories, either old or new. It was after luncheon when some of the girls and boys had strolled off in couples that she began to relate a legend of Lone Island. She prefaced the tale by saying:

"We are upon the spot where began a romance old in story. The parties concerned were Robert Duncan, a young man of Scottish descent, and Winona, an Indian girl. Though the Indians held undisputed ownership of this region at that time, none of them, except those who went down the river carrying furs which they exchanged for tobacco, liquor and baubles for ornaments, ever saw the face of a white man.

"The story goes that young Duncan was a sportsman who took great pleasure in going off fishing and hunting all by himself. On one of his solitary excursions he came up the river as far as the turn where our village is situated, and

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thinking to find another stream beyond this mountain, he shouldered his canoe and climbed the steep slope over which we just came. Imagine his surprise, when, upon reaching the summit, he saw this beautiful lake which now bears his name! A summer sky was reflected in the opalescent waters, and round about him rose the mountains clothed in their virgin forests. Who wonders that he was so overcome by the charm of it that, upon reaching the island, he left his canoe so near the shore that it drifted away?

"When the paleface found that his only means of reaching the mainland was gone he no longer saw beauty in anything. Even the songs of the birds with which he had at first been enraptured seemed to be cries of exultation at his misfortune. While subsisting on fruit and berries he wondered what he should do when the frost came and destroyed them. Then he bethought himself that he had heard his father say:

"'There is no trouble like that which is borrowed,' also, 'it is the unexpected that most often happens.'

"Just at that moment, sure enough," said Miriam, "the unexpected actually came to pass. As the young man lay beneath an overhanging boulder meditating upon his father's trite sayings, he heard the lapping of water on the shore, as if a boat were coming in." Of course, Miriam's listeners thought that an attack upon him by a dozen or more redskins was inevitable. Imagine

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the surprise of everyone when she said: "Before he had time for further conjecture, an Indian girl pushed the prow of her canoe onto the shining strand and stepped out. Unconscious of the presence of any one, she removed her moccasins and waded into the lake. Lest the girl see him and dart off into the wood, young Duncan remained perfectly quiet. When she came out and began removing her leathern garments preparatory to taking a plunge into the lake, he heard a slight rustling of leaves. Looking up, he saw a huge snake suspended from the limb of a tree immediately above her. The hunter had seen the same species of reptile before. Well knowing that a thrust of the creature's fangs meant death to its victim, he sprang from his hiding place, picked up the first stick that came to hand and struck the serpent a deadly blow. Winona fully realized what her fate would have been except for the timely act on the part of the stranger. But, never having seen a white man before, she took him to be a wood nymph that, through the kindly intervention of some spirit, had been sent there to protect her.

"From an old guide the young man had learned something of the Indian language. Thus he was enabled to explain to the young creature that he was not a fairy, but a veritable paleface who was in great need of her assistance to deliver him from exile." Thereupon some one remarked:

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"I'm inclined to think that if she had been a real redskin his bones would be bleaching here on the shore to this day!"

"Don't be too sure that an Indian woman has no sentiment," said Miriam. "When the girl promised to guide the stranger out of the forest, she was already wishing that he might decide to remain.

"To return to the hermit," Miriam continued, "he was lonelier than ever when again left to himself. Throughout the night he prayed to be delivered from his place of bondage; and all day long he waited for his rescuer. Finally, the sun sank into the west and his heart sank with it. When but a disk of crimson remained above the horizon, he heard the glad sound of an oar. Immediately, as if dropping from the heavens, the dusky maiden stood before him arrayed in ornaments befitting a princess. Around her waist a silver girdle hung loosely. Bracelet upon bracelet adorned the slender arms, while her shapely ankles were bedecked with shining bangles. Then, too, upon her fingers glittered many rings.

"If the girl saw an expression of disappointment on the stranger's face she made no allusion to it, but told him that her father was a mighty chief who hated even the name of a paleface.

"'And why should he not,' said she, 'since our people have endured such cruelty at their hands?'"

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Thereupon one of the girls remarked:

"I hope she didn't place poor Duncan at the mercy of her unforgiving father."

"An Indian never forgets a favor done him," said Miriam. "Neither did Winona. In the afterglow which crimsoned the mountain-tops she told the solitary about the deep forests and the animals which inhabited them. She also recounted many roots and herbs and named the wild flowers that grew in abundance near her wigwam. When the girl rose to go, she thought the paleface seemed less anxious to leave his hermitage than he did the day before. Nevertheless, she again promised to guide him out of the forest at the first opportunity. The girl, as pure as the night wind that kissed her bronzed cheek, little dreamed that her interest in the young man was the beginning of love. Nor was Robert Duncan aware that by some subtle charm he was becoming more and more attracted to the Indian maiden.

"It is a long road which has no turn." Then Miriam went on to say: "The old chief, having no sons, frequently took Winona, his favorite daughter, on his hunting expeditions. He praised her courage and told her what a splendid warrior she would make. Meanwhile, the girl was trying to lessen his hatred for the white people, and all for the sake of the strange brave. Finally, with great trepidation she shared her secret with the stern parent. The records make no mention of what passed between father and daughter, but

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the fact that the old chief went with her to the island and brought the young man away is conclusive evidence that the girl won him over to her way of thinking. Whether he took the hermit into his home through pity, or if he wished to learn from him the methods of warfare used by the whites, will never be known."

"And do you suppose that the young man really did live with those dreadful creatures?" queried one of the girls.

"To be sure! And why not?" said Miriam. "If we can believe half that history tells us regarding the indignities to which the red men have been subjected, I think we shall agree that the Indians were not so much more dreadful than their oppressors." Then she asked: "What one of you can tell me to whom this beautiful land belongs even now, if not to the descendants of the red men?"

"But to go back to the legend. Duncan's devotion for his sweetheart soon assured her father of his love for her, and not many moons waxed and waned before the old chief consented to the marriage. Every brave in his tribe was bidden to the wedding, and all night long the forest rang with their merrymaking."

"And is that the end of the story?" Rachel Winn made bold to ask.

"Certainly not, as you shall presently hear." Then the story-teller went on to say: "Nearly every twelve months brought a little papoose to

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the happy couple. Some of them had eyes as black as midnight, while others looked out from a heavenly blue. The father adored the dark-eyed ones for resembling their mother, and she worshiped the little palefaces for his dear sake. But alas! True love never runs smoothly. And the time came when like an eagle swooping down upon its prey an army of whites attacked the red men. They drove them out and set fire to their wigwams. Thus, during young Duncan's absence on one of his hunting trips, his family was rendered homeless. Upon his return he found his wife and children living in a cave on the mountain-side. When he saw the devastation which had been wrought, his heart sank within him. He well knew that those who had befriended him in his time of need had been set upon by his own people. He wept for very shame of his race, and prayed that his face might become bronzed like that of an Indian. It seemed as if the ground opened at that moment and before him stood his father. Murder must have been in the young man's heart when he realized that it was through his parent that such misery had come to those he loved."

"When nearly every one in the company denounced Captain Duncan for having committed such a cowardly act Miriam said, in his defence:

"You must remember that the captain believed his son to have been murdered by the Indians. Therefore, he made a solemn vow to avenge his death. Year after year the half-crazed father

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waited. Finally, he gathered together a company of white men and made the onslaught. When he realized what he had done he suffered equally with those whom he had wronged. On bended knees he begged his son's forgiveness, also that of the beautiful wife. He proposed rebuilding the wigwams and recalling the natives.

"'To rebuild the homes,' said the son, 'would be an easy matter, but to gather the people from the forest where they have taken refuge would be beyond the power of man to do.'

"To all similar suggestions the son turned a deaf ear. But when his father urged him to take his family and come down to the lowlands, where a comfortable house could be erected for their occupancy, young Duncan held out no longer, for was there not his wife and children to be considered?

"Poor Winona! Her heart was broken at the thought of leaving the haunts of her childhood. She said good-bye to the singing pines and to the whispering birches. She lingered by the brooklet which had sung its murmuring songs ever since she could remember. And to the woodland birds she bade a sad farewell. When the time came for leaving the forest her father was nowhere to be found. It is believed to this day that he sought shelter among his own kind rather than to live with the hated palefaces." The slanting rays of the sun were already creeping under the tree-tops when the story-teller said: "And thus it

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was that Robert Duncan became the first settler in Old Riverby. His dwelling stood beside our beautiful stream which Winona was wont to call "Minnehaha" or "Laughing Waters."

That Lone Island was one of Cupid's favorite haunts cannot be doubted. His darts were flung about with such abandon the day of the picnic that even Rachel Winn, the staid Boston girl, was unable to escape them. As if by foreordination (or was it by chance?) there she first met Reginald Parkhurst, of Philadelphia, who three years later led her to the marriage altar.

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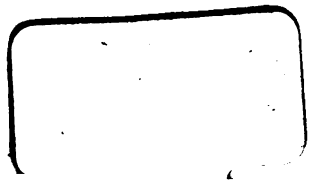

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